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# **JOE MULLER: DETECTIVE**



# Joe Muller: Detective

*Being the Account of Some Adventures  
in the Professional Experience of a Mem-  
ber of the Imperial Austrian Police*

BY  
GRACE ISABEL COLBRON  
AND  
AUGUSTA GRONER



NEW YORK  
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1910



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## JOE MULLER

JOSEPH MULLER, Secret Service detective of the Imperial Austrian police, is one of the great experts in his profession. In personality he differs greatly from other famous detectives. He has neither the impressive authority of Sherlock Holmes, nor the keen brilliancy of Monsieur Lecoq. Muller is a small, slight, plain-looking man, of indefinite age, and of much humbleness of mien. A naturally retiring, modest disposition, and two external causes are the reasons for Muller's humbleness of manner, which is his chief characteristic. One cause is the fact that in early youth a miscarriage of justice gave him several years in prison, an experience which cast a stigma on his name and which made it impossible for him, for many years after, to obtain honest employment. But the world is richer, and safer, by Muller's early misfortune. For it was this experience which threw him back on his own peculiar talents for a livelihood, and drove him into the police force. Had he been able to enter any other profession, his genius might have been stunted to a mere pastime, instead of being, as now, utilised for the public good.

Then, the red tape and bureaucratic etiquette which attaches to every governmental department, puts the secret service men of the Imperial police on a par with the lower ranks of the subordinates. Muller's official rank is scarcely much higher than that of a policeman, although kings and councillors consult him and the Police Department realises to the full what a treasure it has in him. But official red tape, . . . and his early misfortune . . . prevent the giving of

any higher official standing to even such a genius. Born and bred to such conditions, Muller understands them, and his natural modesty of disposition asks for no outward honours, asks for nothing but an income sufficient for his simple needs, and for aid and opportunity to occupy himself in the way he most enjoys.

Joseph Muller's character is a strange mixture. The kindest-hearted man in the world, he is a human bloodhound when once the lure of the trail has caught him. He scarcely eats or sleeps when the chase is on, he does not seem to know human weakness nor fatigue, in spite of his frail body. Once put on a case his mind delves and delves until it finds a clue, then something awakes within him, a spirit akin to that which holds the bloodhound nose to trail, and he will accomplish the apparently impossible, he will track down his victim when the entire machinery of a great police department seems helpless to discover anything. The high chiefs and commissioners grant a condescending permission when Muller asks, "May I do this? . . . or may I handle this case this way?" both parties knowing all the while that it is a farce, and that the department waits helpless until this humble little man saves its honour by solving some problem before which its intricate machinery has stood dazed and puzzled.

This call of the trail is something that is stronger than anything else in Muller's mentality, and now and then it brings him into conflict with the department, . . . or with his own better nature. Sometimes his unerring instinct discovers secrets in high places, secrets which the Police Department is bidden to hush up and leave untouched. Muller is then taken off the case, and left idle for a while if he persists in his opinion as to the true facts. And at other times, Muller's own warm heart gets him into trouble. He will track down his victim, driven by the power in

his soul which is stronger than all volition; but when he has this victim in the net, he will sometimes discover him to be a much finer, better man than the other individual, whose wrong at this particular criminal's hand set in motion the machinery of justice. Several times that has happened to Muller, and each time his heart got the better of his professional instincts, of his practical common-sense, too, perhaps, . . . at least as far as his own advancement was concerned, and he warned the victim, defeating his own work. This peculiarity of Muller's character caused his undoing at last, his official undoing that is, and compelled his retirement from the force. But his advice is often sought unofficially by the Department, and to those who know, Muller's hand can be seen in the unravelling of many a famous case.

The following stories are but a few of the many interesting cases that have come within the experience of this great detective. But they give a fair portrayal of Muller's peculiar method of working, his looking on himself as merely an humble member of the Department, and the comedy of his acting under "official orders" when the Department is in reality following out his directions.



**THE CASE  
OF  
THE LAMP THAT WENT OUT**





## CHAPTER I

### THE DISCOVERY

THE radiance of a clear September morning lay over Vienna. The air was so pure that the sky shone in brightest azure even where the city's buildings clustered thickest. On the outskirts of the town the rays of the awakening sun danced in crystalline ether and struck answering gleams from the dew on grass and shrub in the myriad gardens of the suburban streets.

It was still very early. The old-fashioned steeple clock on the church of the Holy Virgin in Hietzing had boomed out six slow strokes but a short time back. Anna, the pretty blonde girl who carried out the milk for the dwellers in several streets of this aristocratic residential suburb, was just coming around the corner of the main street into a quiet lane. This lane could hardly be dignified by the name of street as yet, it was so very quiet. It had been opened and named scarcely a year back and it was bordered mostly by open gardens or fenced-in building lots. There were four houses in this street, two by two opposite each other, and another, an old-fashioned manor house, lying almost hidden in its great garden. But the quiet street could not presume to ownership of this last house, for the front of it opened on a parallel street, which gave it its number. Only the garden had a gate as outlet onto our quiet lane.

Anna stopped in front of this gate and pulled the bell. She had to wait for some little time until the gardener's wife, who acted as janitress, could open

the door. But Anna was not impatient, for she knew that it was quite a distance from the gardener's house in the centre of the great stretch of park to the little gate where she waited. In a few moments, however, the door was opened and a pleasant-faced woman exchanged a friendly greeting with the girl and took the cans from her.

Anna hastened onward with her usual energetic step. The four houses in that street were already served and she was now bound for the homes of customers several squares away. Then her step slowed just a bit. She was a quiet, thoughtful girl, and the lovely peace of this bright morning sank into her heart and made her rejoice in its beauty. All around her the foliage was turning gently to its autumn glory of colouring and the dewdrops on the rich-hued leaves sparkled with an unusual radiance. A thrush looked down at her from a bough and began its morning song. Anna smiled up at the little bird and began herself to sing a merry tune.

But suddenly her voice died away, the colour faded from her flushed cheeks, her eyes opened wide and she stood as if riveted to the ground. With a deep breath as of unconscious terror she let the burden of the milk cans drop gently from her shoulder to the ground. In following the bird's flight her eyes had wandered to the side of the street, to the edge of one of the vacant lots, there where a shallow ditch separated it from the roadway. 'An elder-tree, the great size of which attested its age, hung its berry-laden branches over the ditch. And in front of this tree the bird had stopped suddenly, then fluttered off with the quick movement of the wild creature surprised by fright. What the bird had seen was the same vision that halted the song on Anna's lips and arrested her foot. It was the body of a man—a young and well-dressed man, who lay there with his face

turned toward the street. And his face was the white frozen face of a corpse.

Anna stood still, looking down at him for a few moments in wide-eyed terror: then she walked on slowly as if trying to pull herself together again. A few steps and then she turned and broke into a run. When she reached the end of the street, breathless from haste and excitement, she found herself in one of the main arteries of traffic of the suburb, but owing to the early hour this street was almost as quiet as the lane she had just left. Finally the frightened girl's eyes caught sight of the figure of a policeman coming around the next corner. She flew to meet him and recognised him as the officer of that beat.

"Why, what is the matter?" he asked. "Why are you so excited?"

"Down there—in the lane, there's a dead man," answered the girl, gasping for breath.

"A dead man?" repeated the policeman gravely, looking at the girl. "Are you sure he's dead?"

Anna nodded. "His eyes are all glassy and I saw blood on his back."

"Well, you're evidently very much frightened, and I suppose you don't want to go down there again. I'll look into the matter, if you will go to the police station and make the announcement. Will you do it?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right, then, that will gain time for us. Good-bye, Miss Anna."

The man walked quickly down the street, while the girl hurried off in the opposite direction, to the nearest police station, where she told what she had seen.

The policeman reached his goal even earlier. The first glance told him that the man lying there by the

wayside was indeed lifeless. And the icy stiffness of the hand which he touched showed him that life must have fled many hours back. Anna had been right about the blood also. The dead man lay on the farther side of the ditch, half down into it. His right arm was bent under his body, his left arm was stretched out, and the stiffened fingers . . . they were slender white fingers . . . had sought for something to break his fall. All they had found was a tall stem of wild aster with its purple blossoms, which they were holding fast in the death grip. On the dead man's back was a small bullet-wound and around the edges of it his light grey coat was stained with blood. His face was distorted in pain and terror. It was a nice face, or would have been, did it not show all too plainly the marks of dissipation in spite of the fact that the man could not have been much past thirty years old. He was a stranger to the policeman, although the latter had been on this beat for over three years.

When the guardian of the law had convinced himself that there was nothing more to do for the man who lay there, he rose from his stooping position and stepped back. His gaze wandered up and down the quiet lane, which was still absolutely empty of human life. He stood there quietly waiting, watching over the ghastly discovery. In about ten minutes the police commissioner and the coroner, followed by two roundsmen with a litter, joined the solitary watcher, and the latter could return to his post.

The policemen set down their litter and waited for orders, while the coroner and the commissioner bent over the corpse. There was nothing for the physician to do but to declare that the unfortunate man had been dead for many hours. The bullet which struck him in the back had killed him at once. The commissioner examined the ground immediately around

the corpse, but could find nothing that pointed to a struggle. There remained only to prove whether there had been a robbery as well as a murder.

"Judging from the man's position the bullet must have come from that direction," said the commissioner, pointing towards the cottages down the lane.

"People who are killed by bullets may turn several times before they fall," said a gentle voice behind the police officer. The voice seemed to suit the thin little man who stood there meekly, his hat in his hand.

The commissioner turned quickly. "Ah, are you there already, Muller?" he said, as if greatly pleased, while the physician broke in with the remark: "That's just what I was about to observe. This man did not die so quickly that he could not have made a voluntary or involuntary movement before life fled. The shot that killed him might have come from any direction."

The commissioner nodded thoughtfully and there was silence for a few moments. Muller—for the little thin man was none other than the celebrated Joseph Muller, one of the most brilliant detectives in the service of the Austrian police—looked down at the corpse carefully. He took plenty of time to do it and nobody hurried him. For nobody ever hurried Muller; his well-known and almost laughable thoroughness and pedantry were too valuable in their results. It was a tradition in the police that Muller was to have all the time he wanted for everything. It paid in the end, for Muller made few mistakes. Therefore, his superior the police commissioner, and the coroner waited quietly while the little man made his inspection of the corpse.

"Thank you," said Muller finally, with a polite bow to the commissioner, before he bent to brush away the dust on his knees.

"Well?" asked Commissioner Holzer.

Muller smiled an embarrassed smile as he replied: "Well . . . I haven't found out anything yet except that he is dead, and that he has been shot in the back. His pockets may tell us something more."

"Yes, we can examine them at once," said the commissioner. "I have been delaying that for I wanted you here; but I had no idea that you would come so soon. I told them to fetch you if you were awake, but doubted you would be, for I know you have had no sleep for forty-eight hours."

"Oh, I can sleep, at least with one eye, when I'm on the chase," answered the detective. "So it's really only twenty-four hours, you see." Muller had just returned from tracking down an aristocratic swindler whom he had found finally in a little French city and had brought back to a Viennese prison. He had returned well along in the past night and Holzer knew that the tired man would need his rest. Still he had sent for Muller, who lived near the police station, for the girl's report had warned him that this was a serious case. And in serious cases the police did not like to do without Muller's help.

And as usual when his work called him, Muller was as wide awake as if he had had a good night's sleep behind him. The interest of a new case robbed him of every trace of fatigue. It was he alone—at his own request—who raised the body and laid it on its back before he stepped aside to make way for the doctor.

The physician opened the dead man's vest to see whether the bullet had passed completely through the body. But it had not; there was not the slightest trace of blood upon the shirt.

"There's nothing more for me to do here, Muller," said the physician, as he bowed to the commissioner and left the place.

Muller examined the pockets of the dead man.

"It's probably a case of robbery, too," remarked the commissioner. "A man as well-dressed as this one is would be likely to have a watch."

"And a purse," added the detective. "But this man has neither—or at least he has them no longer."

In the various pockets of the dead man's clothes Muller found the following articles: a handkerchief, several tramway tickets, a penknife, a tiny mirror, and comb, and a little book, a cheap novel. He wrapped them all in the handkerchief and put them in his own pocket. The dead man's coat had fallen back from his body during the examination, and as Muller turned the stiffened limbs a little he saw the opening of another pocket high up over the right hip of the trousers. The detective passed his hand over the pocket and heard something rattle. Then he put his hand in the pocket and drew out a thin narrow envelope which he handed to the commissioner. Holzer looked at it carefully. It was made of very thin expensive paper and bore no address. But it was sealed, although not very carefully, for the gummed edges were open in spots. It must have been hastily closed and was slightly crushed as if it had been carried in a clenched hand. The commissioner cut open the envelope with his penknife. He gave an exclamation of surprise as he showed Muller the contents. In the envelope there were three hundred-gulden notes.

The commissioner looked at Muller without a word, but the detective understood and shook his head. "No," he said calmly, "it may be a case of robbery just the same. This pocket was not very easy to find, and the money in it was safer than the dead man's watch and purse would be. That is, if he had a watch and purse—and he very probably had a watch," he added more quickly.

For Muller had made a little discovery. On the



lower hem of the left side of the dead man's waistcoat he saw a little lump, and feeling of it he discovered that it was a watch key which had slipped down out of the torn pocket between the lining and the material of the vest. A sure proof that the dead man had had a watch, which in all probability had been taken from him by his murderer. There was no loose change or small bills to be found in any of the pockets, so that it was more than likely that the dead man had had his money in a purse. It seemed to be a case of murder for the sake of robbery. At least Muller and the commissioner believed it to be one, from what they had discovered thus far.

The police officer gave his men orders to raise the body and to take it to the morgue. An hour later the unknown man lay in the bare room in which the only spot of brightness were the rays of the sun that crept through the high barred windows and touched his cold face and stiffened form as with a pitying caress. But no, there was one other little spot of brightness in the silent place. It was the wild aster which the dead man's hand still held tightly clasped. The little purple flowers were quite fresh yet, and the dewdrops clinging to them greeted the kiss of the sun's rays with an answering smile.

## CHAPTER II

### THE BROKEN WILLOW TWIG

'As soon as the corpse had been taken away, the police commissioner returned to the station. But Muller remained there all alone to make a thorough examination of the entire vicinity.

It was not a very attractive spot, this particular part of the street. There must have been a nursery

there at one time, for there were still several ordered rows of small trees to be seen. There were traces of flower cultivation as well, for several trailing vines and overgrown bushes showed where shrubs had been grown which do not usually grow without man's assistance. Immediately back of the old elder tree Muller found several fine examples of rare flowers, or rather he found the shrubs which his experienced eye recognised as having once borne these unusual blossoms. One or two blooms still hung to the bushes and the detective, who was a great lover of flowers, picked them and put them in his buttonhole. While he did this, his keen eyes were darting about the place taking in all the details. This vacant lot had evidently been used as an unlicensed dumping ground for some time, for all sorts of odds and ends, old boots, bits of stuff, silk and rags, broken bottles and empty tin cans, lay about between the bushes or half buried in the earth. What had once been an orderly garden was now an untidy receptacle for waste. The pedantically neat detective looked about him in disgust, then suddenly he forgot his displeasure and a gleam shot up in his eye. It was very little, the thing this man had seen, this man who saw so much more than others.

About ten paces from where he stood a high wooden fence hemmed in the lot. The fence belonged to the neighbouring property, as the lot in which he stood was not protected in any way. To the back it was closed off by a corn field where the tall stalks rustled gently in the faint morning breeze. All this could be seen by anybody and Muller had seen it all at his first glance. But now he had seen something else. Something that excited him because it might possibly have some connection with the newly discovered crime. His keen eyes, in glancing along the wooden fence at his right hand, had caught sight of

a little twig which had worked its way through the fence. This twig belonged to a willow tree which grew on the other side, and which spread its grey-green foliage over the fence or through its wide openings. One of the little twigs which had crept in between the planks was broken, and it had been broken very recently, for the leaves were still fresh and the sap was oozing from the crushed stem. Muller walked over to the fence and examined the twig carefully. He soon saw how it came to be broken. The broken part was about the height of a man's knee from the ground. And just at this height there was quite a space between two of the planks of the fence, heavy planks which were laid cross-ways and nailed to thick posts. It would have been very easy for anybody to get a foothold in this open space between the planks.

It was very evidently some foot thrust in between the planks which had broken the little willow twig, and its soft rind had left a green mark on the lower plank. "I wonder if that has anything to do with the murder," thought Muller, looking over the fence into the lot on the other side.

This neighbouring plot was evidently a neglected garden. It had once worn an aristocratic air, with stone statues and artistic arrangement of flower beds and shrubs. It was still attractive even in its neglected condition. Beyond it, through the foliage of its heavy trees, glass windows caught the sunlight. Muller remembered that there was a handsome old house in this direction, a house with a mansard roof and wide-reaching wings. He did not now know to whom this handsome old house belonged, a house that must have been built in the time of Maria Theresa, . . . but he was sure of one thing, and that was that he would soon find out to whom it belonged. At present it was the garden which inter-

ested him, and he was anxious to see where it ended. A few moments' further inspection showed him what he wanted to know. The garden extended to the beginning of the park-like grounds which surrounded the old house with the mansard roof. A tall iron railing separated the garden from the park, but this railing did not extend down as far as the quiet lane. Where it ended there was a light, well-built wooden fence. Along the street side of the fence there was a high thick hedge. Muller walked along this hedge until he came to a little gate. Then crossing the street, he saw that the house whose windows glistened in the sunlight was a house which he knew well from its other side, its front façade.

Now he went back to the elder tree and then walked slowly away from this to the spot where he found the broken willow twig. He examined every foot of the ground, but there was nothing to be seen that was of any interest to him—not a footprint, or anything to prove that some one else had passed that way a short time before. And yet it would have been impossible to pass that way without leaving some trace, for the ground was cut up in all directions by mole hills.

Next the detective scrutinised as much of the surroundings as would come into immediate connection with the spot where the corpse had been found. There was nothing to be seen there either, and Muller was obliged to acknowledge that he had discovered nothing that would lead to an understanding of the crime, unless, indeed, the broken willow twig should prove to be a clue. He sprang back across the ditch, turned up the edges of his trousers where they had been moistened by the dew and walked slowly along the dusty street. He was no longer alone in the lane. An old man, accompanied by a large dog, came out from one of the new houses and walked towards the

detective. He was very evidently going in the direction of the elder-tree, which had already been such a centre of interest that morning. When he met Muller, the old man halted, touched his cap and asked in a confidential tone: "I suppose you've been to see the place already?"

"Which place?" was Muller's reserved answer.

"Why, I mean the place where they found the man who was murdered. They found him under that elder-tree. My wife just heard of it and told me. I suppose everybody round here will know it soon."

"Was there a man murdered here?" asked Muller, as if surprised by the news.

"Yes, he was shot last night. Only I don't understand why I didn't hear the shot. I couldn't sleep a wink all night for the pain in my bones."

"You live near here, then?"

"Yes, I live in No. 1. Didn't you see me coming out?"

"I didn't notice it. I came across the wet meadows and I stooped to turn up my trousers so that they wouldn't get dusty—it must have been then you came out."

"Why, then you must have been right near the place I was talking about. Do you see that elder tree there? It's the only one in the street, and the girl who brings the milk found the man under it. The police have been here already and have taken him away. They discovered him about six o'clock and now it's just seven."

"And you hadn't any suspicion that this dreadful thing was happening so near you?" asked the detective casually.

"I didn't know a thing, sir, not a thing. There couldn't have been a fight or I would have heard it. But I don't know why I didn't hear the shot."

"Why, then you must have been asleep after all, in spite of your pain," said Muller with a smile, as he walked along beside the man back to the place from which he had just come.

The old man shook his head. "No, I tell you I didn't close an eye all night. I went to bed at half-past nine and I smoked two pipes before I put out the light, and then I heard every hour strike all night long and it wasn't until nearly five o'clock, when it was almost dawn, that I dozed off a bit."

"Then it is astonishing that you didn't hear anything!"

"Sure it's astonishing! But it's still more astonishing that my dog Sultan didn't hear anything. Sultan is a famous watchdog, I'd have you know. He'll growl if anybody passes through the street after dark, and I don't see why he didn't notice what was going on over there last night. If a man's attacked, he generally calls for help; it's a queer business all right."

"Well, Sultan, why didn't you make a noise?" asked Muller, patting the dog's broad head. Sultan growled and walked on indifferently, after he had shaken off the strange hand.

"He must have slept more soundly than usual. He went off into the country with me yesterday. We had an errand to do there and on the way back we stopped in for a drink. Sultan takes a drop or two himself occasionally, and that usually makes him sleep. I had hard work to bring him home. We got here just a few minutes before half-past nine and I tell you we were both good and tired."

By this time they had come to the elder-tree and the old man's stream of talk ceased as he stood before the spot where the mysterious crime had occurred. He looked down thoughtfully at the grass, now trampled by many feet. "Who could have

done it?" he murmured finally, with a sigh that expressed his pity for the victim.

"Hietzing is known to be one of the safest spots in Vienna," remarked Muller.

"Indeed it is, sir; indeed it is. As it would well have to be with the royal castles right here in the neighbourhood! Indeed it would have to be safe with the Court coming here all the time."

"Why, yes, you see more police here than anywhere else in the city."

"Yes, they're always sticking their nose in where they're not necessary," remarked the old man, not realising to whom he was speaking. "They fuss about everything you do or don't do, and yet a man can be shot down right under our very noses here and the police can't help it."

"But, my dear sir, it isn't always possible for the police to prevent a criminal carrying out his evil intention," said Muller good-naturedly.

"Well, why not? if they watch out sharp enough?"

"The police watch out sharper than most people think. But they can't catch a man until he has committed his crime, can they?"

"No, I suppose not," said the old man, with another glance at the elder-tree. He bowed to Muller and turned and walked away.

Muller followed him slowly, very much pleased with this meeting, for it had given him a new clue. There was no reason to doubt the old man's story. And if this story was true, then the crime had been committed before half-past nine of the evening previous. For the old man—he was evidently the janitor in No. 1—had not heard the shot.

Muller left the scene of the crime and walked towards the four houses. Before he reached them he had to pass the garden which belonged to the house with the mansard roof. Right and left of this gar-

den were vacant lots, as well as on the opposite side of the street. Then came to the right and left the four new houses which stood at the beginning of the quiet lane. Muller passed them, turned up a cross street and then down again, into the street running parallel to the lane, a quiet aristocratic street on which fronted the house with the mansard roof.

A carriage stood in front of this house, two great trunks piled up on the box beside the driver. A young girl and an old man in livery were placing bags and bundles of rugs inside the carriage. Muller walked slowly toward the carriage. Just as he reached the open gate of the garden he was obliged to halt, to his own great satisfaction. For at this moment a group of people came out from the house, the owners of it evidently, prepared for a journey and surrounded by their servants.

Beside the old man and the young girl, there were two other women, one evidently the housekeeper, the other possibly the cook. The latter was weeping openly and devoutly kissing the hand of her mistress. The housekeeper discovered that a rug was missing and sent the maid back for it, while the old servant helped the lady into the carriage. The door of the carriage was wide open and Muller had a good glimpse of the pale, sweet-faced and delicate-looking young woman who leaned back in her corner, shivering and evidently ill. The servants bustled about, making her comfortable, while her husband superintended the work with anxious tenderness. He was a tall, fine-looking man with deep-set grey eyes and a rich, sympathetic voice. He gave his orders to his servants with calm authority, but he also was evidently suffering from the disease of our century—nervousness, for Muller saw that the man's hands clenched feverishly and that his lips were trembling under his drooping moustache.



The maid hastened down with the rug and spread it over her mistress's knees, as the gentleman exclaimed nervously: "Do hurry with that! Do you want us to miss the train?"

The butler closed the door of the carriage, the coachman gathered up the reins and raised his whip. The housekeeper bowed low and murmured a few words in farewell and the other servants followed her example with tears in their eyes. "You'll see us again in six weeks," the lady called out and her husband added: "If all goes well." Then he motioned to the waiting driver and the carriage moved off swiftly, turning the corner in a few moments.

The little group of servants returned to the courtyard behind the high gates. Muller, whom they had not noticed, was about to resume his walk, when he halted again. The courtyard of the house led back through a flagged walk to the park-like garden that surrounded it on the sides and rear. Down this walk came a young woman. She came so quickly that one might almost call it running. She was evidently excited about something. Muller imagined what this something might be, and he remained to hear what she had to say. He was not mistaken. The woman, it was Mrs. Schmiedler, the gardener's wife, began her story at once. "Haven't you heard yet?" she said breathlessly. "No, you can't have heard it yet or you wouldn't stand there so quietly, Mrs. Bernauer."

"What's the matter?" asked the woman whom Muller took to be the housekeeper.

"They killed a man last night out here! They found his body just now in the lane back of our garden. The janitor from No. 1 told me as I was going to the store, so I went right back to look at the place, and I came to tell you, as I didn't think you'd heard it yet."

Mrs. Bernauer was evidently a woman of strong constitution and of an equable mind. The other three servants broke out into an excited hubbub of talk while she remained quite indifferent and calm. "One more poor fellow who had to leave the world before he was ready," she remarked calmly, with just the natural touch of pity in her voice that would come to any warm-hearted human being upon hearing of such an occurrence. She did not seem at all excited or alarmed to think that the scene of the crime had been so near.

The other servants were very much more excited and had already rushed off, under the guidance of the gardener's wife, to look at the dreadful spot. Franz, the butler, had quite forgotten to close the front gate in his excitement, and the housekeeper turned to do it now.

"The fools, see them run," she exclaimed half aloud. "As if there was anything for them to do there."

The gate closed, Mrs. Bernauer turned and walked slowly to the house. Muller walked on also, going first to the police station to report what he had discovered. Then he went to his own rooms and slept until nearly noon. On his return to the police station he found that notices of the occurrence had already been sent out to the papers.

## CHAPTER III

### THE EVENING PAPER

THE autopsy proved beyond a doubt that the murdered man had been dead for many hours before the discovery of his body. The bullet which had struck him in the back had pierced the trachea and death had occurred within a few minutes. The only marks

for identification of the body were the initials L. W. on his underwear. The evening paper printed an exact description of the man's appearance and his clothing.

It was about ten o'clock next morning when Mrs. Klingmayer, a widow living in a quiet street at the opposite end of the city from Hietzing, returned from her morning marketing. It was only a few little bundles that she brought with her and she set about preparing her simple dinner. Her packages were wrapped in newspapers, which she carefully smoothed out and laid on the dresser.

Mrs. Klingmayer was the widow of a street-car conductor and the little pension which she received from the company, as well as the money she could earn for herself, did not permit of the indulgence in a daily newspaper. And yet the reading of the papers was the one luxury for which the simple woman longed. Her grocer, who was a friend of years, knew this and would wrap up her purchases in papers of recent date, knowing that she could then enjoy them in her few moments of leisure. To-day this leisure came unexpectedly early, for Mrs. Klingmayer had less work than usual to attend to.

Her little flat consisted of two rooms and a kitchen with a large closet opening out from it. She lived in the kitchen and rented the front rooms. Her tenants were a middle-aged man, inspector in a factory, who had the larger room; and a younger man who was bookkeeper in an importing house in the city. But this young man had not been at home for forty-eight hours, a fact, however, which did not greatly worry his landlady. The gentleman in question lived a rather dissipated life and it was not the first time that he had remained away from home over night. It is true that it was the first time that he had not been home for two successive nights. But as

Mrs. Klingmayer thought, everything has to happen the *first* time sometime. "It's not likely to be the last time," the worthy woman thought.

At all events she was rather glad of it to-day, for she suffered from rheumatism and it was difficult for her to get about. The young man's absence saved her the work of fixing up his room that morning and allowed her to get to her reading earlier than usual. When she had put the pot of soup on the fire, she sat down by the window, adjusted her big spectacles and began to read. To her great delight she discovered that the paper she held in her hand bore the date of the previous afternoon. In spite of the good intentions of her friend the grocer, it was not always that she could get a paper of so recent date, and she began to read with doubled anticipation of pleasure.

She did not waste time on the leading articles, for she understood little about politics. The serial stories were a great delight to her, or would have been, if she had ever been able to follow them consecutively. But her principal joy were the everyday happenings of varied interest which she found in the news columns. To-day she was so absorbed in the reading of them that the soup pot began to boil over and send out rivulets down onto the stove. Ordinarily this would have shocked Mrs. Klingmayer, for the neatness of her pots and pans was the one great care of her life. But now, strange to relate, she paid no attention to the soup, nor to the smell and the smoke that arose from the stove. She had just come upon a notice in the paper which took her entire attention. She read it through three times, and each time with growing excitement. This is what she read:

#### MURDER IN HIETZING.

This morning at six o'clock the body of a man about 30

years old was discovered in a lane in Hietzing. The man must have been dead many hours. He had been shot from behind. The dead man was tall and thin, with brown eyes, brown hair and moustache. The letters L. W. were embroidered in his underwear. There was nothing else discovered on him that could reveal his identity. His watch and purse were not in his pockets: presumably they had been taken by the murderer. A strange fact is that in one of his pockets—a hidden pocket it is true—there was the sum of 300 guildens in bills.

This was the notice which made Mrs. Klingmayer neglect the soup pot.

Finally the old woman stood up very slowly, threw a glance at the stove and opened the window mechanically. Then she lifted the pots from the fire and set them on the outer edge of the range. And then she did something that ordinarily would have shocked her economical soul—she poured water on the fire to put it out.

When she saw that there was not a spark left in the stove, she went into her own little room and prepared to go out. Her excitement caused her to forget her rheumatism entirely. One more look around her little kitchen, then she locked it up and set out for the centre of the city.

She went to the office of the importing house where her tenant, Leopold Winkler, was employed as book-keeper. The clerk at the door noticed the woman's excitement and asked her kindly what the trouble was.

"I'd like to speak to Mr. Winkler," she said eagerly.

"Mr. Winkler hasn't come in yet," answered the young man. "Is anything the matter? You look so white! Winkler will probably show up soon, he's never very punctual. But it's after eleven o'clock now and he's never been as late as this before."

"I don't believe he'll ever come again," said the old woman, sinking down on a bench beside the door.

"Why, what do you mean?" asked the clerk.  
 "Why shouldn't he come again?"

"Is the head of the firm here?" asked Mrs. Klingmayer, wiping her forehead with her handkerchief. The clerk nodded and hurried away to tell his employer about the woman with the white face who came to ask for a man who, as she expressed it, "would never come there again."

"I don't think she's quite right in the head," he volunteered. The head of the firm told him to bring the woman into the inner office.

"Who are you, my good woman?" he asked kindly, softened by the evident agitation of this poorly though neatly dressed woman.

"I am Mr. Winkler's landlady," she answered.

"Ah! and he wants you to tell me that he's sick? I'm afraid I can't believe all that this gentleman says. I hope he's not asking your help to lie to me. Are you sure that his illness is anything else but a case of being up late?"

"I don't think that he'll ever be sick again—I didn't come with any message from him, sir; please read this, sir." And she handed him the newspaper, showing him the notice. While the gentleman was reading she added: "Mr. Winkler didn't come home last night either."

Winkler's employer read the few lines, then laid the paper aside with a very serious face. "When did you see him last?" he asked of the woman.

"Day before yesterday in the morning. He went away about half-past eight as he usually does," she replied. And then she added a question of her own: "Was he here day before yesterday?"

The merchant nodded and pressed an electric bell. Then he rose from his seat and pulled up a chair for his visitor. "Sit down here. This thing has frightened you and you are no longer young."

When the servant entered, the merchant told him to ask the head bookkeeper to come to the inner office.

When this official appeared, his employer inquired: "When did Winkler leave here day before yesterday?"

"At six o'clock, sir, as usual."

"He was here all day without interruption?"

"Yes, sir, with the exception of the usual luncheon hour."

"Did he have the handling of any money Monday?"

"No, sir."

"Thank you, Mr. Pokorny," said the merchant, handing his employee the evening paper and pointing to the notice which had so interested him.

Pokorny read it, his face, like his employer's, growing more serious. "It looks almost as if it must be Winkler, sir," he said, in a few moments.

"We will soon find that out. I should like to go to the police station myself with this woman; she is Winkler's landlady—but I think it will be better for you to accompany her. They will ask questions about the man which you will be better able to answer than I."

Pokorny bowed and left the room. Mrs. Klingmayer rose and was about to follow, when the merchant asked her to wait a moment and inquired whether Winkler owed her anything. "I am sorry that you should have had this shock and the annoyances and trouble which will come of it, but I don't want you to be out of pocket by it."

"No, he doesn't owe me anything," replied the honest old woman, shaking her head. A few big tears rolled down over her withered cheeks, possibly the only tears that were shed for the dead man under the elder-tree. But even this sympathetic soul could find nothing to say in his praise. (She could feel pity for his dreadful death, but she could not assert that the

world had lost anything by his going out of it. As if saddened by the impossibility of finding a single good word to say about the dead man, she left the office with drooping head and lagging step.

Pokorny helped her into the cab that was already waiting before the door. The office force had got wind of the fact that something unusual had occurred and were all at the windows to see them drive off. The three clerks who worked in the department to which Winkler belonged gathered together to talk the matter over. They were none of them particularly hit by it, but naturally they were interested in the discovery in Hietzing, and equally naturally, they tried to find a few good words to say about the man whose life had ended so suddenly.

The youngest of them, Fritz Bormann, said some kind words and was about to wax more enthusiastic, when Degenhart, the eldest clerk, cut in with the words: "Oh, don't trouble yourself. Nobody ever liked Winkler here. He was not a good man—he was not even a good worker. This is the first time that he has a reasonable excuse for neglecting his duties."

"Oh, come, see here! how can you talk about the poor man that way when he's scarcely cold in death yet," said Fritz indignantly.

Degenhart laughed harshly.

"Did I ever say anything else about him while he was warm and alive? Death is no reason for changing one's opinion about a man who was good-for-nothing in life. And his death was a stroke of good luck that he scarcely deserved. He died without a moment's pain, with a merry thought in his head, perhaps, while many another better man has to linger in torture for weeks. No, Bormann, the best I can say about Winkler is that his death makes one non-entity the less on earth."

The older man turned to his desk again and the two



younger clerks continued the conversation: "Degenhart appears to be a hard man," said Fritz, "but he's the best and kindest person I know, and he's dead right in what he says. It was simply a case of conventional superstition. I never did like that Winkler."

"No, you're right," said the other. "Neither did I and I don't know why, for the matter of that. He seemed just like a thousand others. I never heard of anything particularly wrong that he did."

"No, no more did I," continued Bormann, "but I never heard of anything good about him either. And don't you think that it's worse for a man to seem to repel people by his very personality, rather than by any particular bad thing that he does?"

"Yes. I don't know how to explain it, but that's just how I feel about it. I had an instinctive feeling that there was something wrong about Winkler, the sort of a creepy, crawly feeling that a snake gives you."

## CHAPTER IV

### SPEAK WELL OF THE DEAD

MEANWHILE Pokorny and Mrs. Klingmayer had reached the police station and were going upstairs to the rooms of the commissioner on service for the day. Like all people of her class, Mrs. Klingmayer stood in great awe and terror of anything connected with the police or the law generally. She crept slowly and tremblingly up the stairs behind the head bookkeeper and was very glad when she was left alone for a few minutes while Pokorny went in to see the commissioner. But as soon as his errand was known, both the bookkeeper and his companion were led into the office of Head Commissioner Dr.

von Riedau, who had charge of the Hietzing murder case.

When Dr. von Riedau heard the reason of their coming, his interest was immediately aroused, and he pulled a chair to his side for the little thin man with whom he had been talking when the two strangers were ushered in.

"Then you believe you could identify the murdered man?" asked the commissioner.

"From the general description and the initials on his linen, I believe it must be Leopold Winkler," answered Pokorny. "Mrs. Klingmayer has not seen him since Monday morning, nor has she had any message from him. He left the office Monday afternoon at 6 o'clock and that was the last time that we saw him. The only thing that makes me doubt his identity is that the paper reports that three hundred gulden were found in his pocket. Winkler never seemed to have money, and I do not understand how he should have been in possession of such a sum."

"The money was found in the dead man's pockets," said the commissioner. "And yet it may be Winkler, the man you know. Muller, will you order a cab, please?"

"I have a cab waiting for me. But it only holds two," volunteered Pokorny.

"That doesn't matter, I'll sit on the box," answered the man addressed as Muller.

"You are going with us?" asked Pokorny.

"Yes, he will accompany you," replied the commissioner. "This is detective Muller, sir. By a mere chance, he happened to be on hand to take charge of this case and he will remain in charge, although it may be wasting his talents which we need for more difficult problems. If you or any one else have anything to tell us, it must be told only to me or to Muller. And before you leave to look at the body,

I would like to know whether the dead man owned a watch, or rather whether he had it with him on the day of the murder."

"Yes, sir; he did have a watch, a gold watch," answered Mrs. Klingmayer.

Riedau looked at the bookkeeper, who nodded and said: "Yes, sir; Winkler had a watch, a gold watch with a double case. It was a large watch, very thick. I happen to have noticed it by chance and also I happen to know that he had not had the watch for very long."

"Can you tell us anything more about the watch?" asked the commissioner of the landlady.

"Yes, sir; there was engraving on the outside cover, initials, and a crown on the other side."

"What were the initials?"

"I don't know that, sir; at least I'm not sure about it. There were so many twists and curves to them that I couldn't make them out. I think one of them was a *W* though, sir."

"The other was probably an *L* then."

"That might be, sir."

"The younger clerks in the office may be able to tell something more about the watch," said Pokorny, "for they were quite interested in it for a while. It was a handsome watch and they were envious of Winkler's possession of it. But he was so tactless in his boasting about it that they paid no further attention to him after the first excitement."

"You say he didn't have the watch long?"

"Since spring I think, sir."

"He brought it home on the 19th of March," interrupted Mrs. Klingmayer. "I remember the day because it was my birthday. I pretended that he had brought it home to me for a present."

"Was he in the habit of making you presents?"

"Oh, no, sir; he was very close with his money, sir."

"Well, perhaps he didn't have much money to be generous with. Now tell me about his watch chain. I suppose he had a watch chain?"

Both the bookkeeper and the landlady nodded and the latter exclaimed: "Oh, yes, sir; I could recognise it in a minute."

"How?"

"It was broken once and Mr. Winkler mended it himself. I lent him my pliers and he bent the two links together with them. It didn't look very nice after that, but it was strong again. You could see the mark of the pliers easily."

"Why didn't he take the chain to the jeweler's to be fixed?" asked the commissioner.

The woman smiled. "It wouldn't have been worth the money, sir; the chain wasn't real gold."

"But the watch was real, wasn't it?"

"Oh, yes, sir; that was real gold. I pawned it once for Mr. Winkler and they gave me 24 gulden for it."

"One question more, did he have a purse? And did he have it with him on the day of the murder?"

"Yes, sir; he had a purse, and he must have taken it with him because he didn't leave it in his room."

"What sort of a purse was it?"

"A brown leather purse, sir."

"Was it a new one?"

"Oh, no, sir; it was well worn."

"How big was it? About like mine?" Riedau took out his own pocketbook.

"No, sir; it was a little smaller. It had three pockets in it. I mended it for him once, so I know it well. I didn't have any brown thread so I mended it with yellow."

Dr. von Riedau nodded to Muller. The latter had been sitting at a little side-table writing down the questions and answers. When Riedau saw this he

did not send for a clerk to do the work, for Muller preferred to attend to such matters himself as much as possible. The facts gained in the examination were impressed upon his mind while he was writing them, and he did not have to wade through pages of manuscript to get at what he needed. Now he handed his superior officer the paper.

"Thank you," said Riedau, "I'll send it out to the other police stations. I will attend to this myself. You go on with these people to see whether they can identify the corpse."

Fifteen minutes later the three stood before the body in the morgue and both the bookkeeper and his companion identified the dead man positively as Leopold Winkler.

When the identification was made, a notice was sent out to all Austrian police stations and to all pawnshops with an exact description of the stolen watch and purse.

Muller led his companions back to the commissioner's office and they made their report to Dr. von Riedau. Upon being questioned further, Pokorny stated: "I had very little to do with Winkler. We met only when he had a report to make to me or to show me his books, and we never met outside the office. The clerks who worked in the same room with him, may know him better. I know only that he was a very reserved man and very little liked."

"Then I do not need to detain you any longer, nor to trouble you further in this affair. I thank you for coming to us so promptly. It has been of great assistance."

The bookkeeper left the station, but Mrs. Klingmayer, who was now quite reassured as to the harmlessness of the police, was asked to remain and to tell what she knew of the private life of the murdered

man. Her answers to the various questions put to her proved that she knew very little about her tenant. But this much was learned from her: that he was very close with his money at times, but that again at other times he seemed to have all he wanted to spend. At such times he paid all his debts, and when he stayed home for supper, he would send her out for all sorts of expensive delicacies. These extravagant days seemed to have nothing whatever to do with Winkler's business pay day, but came at odd times.

Mrs. Klingmayer remembered two separate times when he had received a postal money order. But she did not know from whom the letters came, nor even whether they were sent from the city or from some other town. Winkler received other letters now and then, but his landlady was not of the prying kind, and she had paid very little attention to them.

He seemed to have few friends or even acquaintances. She did not know of any love affair, at least of nothing "regular." He had remained away over night two or three times during the year that he had been her tenant. This was about all that Mrs. Klingmayer could say, and she returned to her home in a cab furnished her by the kind commissioner.

About two hours later, a police attendant announced that a gentleman would like to see Dr. von Riedau on business concerning the murder in Hietzing. "Friedrich Bormann" was the name on the card.

"Ask him to step in here," said the commissioner. "And please ask Mr. Muller to join us."

The good-looking young clerk entered the office bashfully and Muller slipped in behind him, seating himself inconspicuously by the door. At a sign from the commissioner the visitor began. "I am an employee of Braun & Co. I have the desk next to Leopold Winkler, during the year that he has been with us—the year and a quarter to be exact——"

"Ah, then you know him rather well?"

"Why, yes. At least we were together all day, although I never met him outside the office."

"Then you cannot tell us much about his private life?"

"No, sir, but there was something happened on Monday, and in talking it over with Mr. Braun, he suggested that I should come to you and tell you about it. It wasn't really very important, and it doesn't seem as if it could have anything to do with this murder and robbery; still it may be of some use."

"Everything that would throw light on the dead man's life could be of use," said Dr. von Riedau. "Please tell us what it is you know."

Fritz Bormann began: "Winkler came to the office as usual on Monday morning and worked steadily at his desk. But I happened to notice that he spoiled several letters and had to rewrite them, which showed me that his thoughts were not on his work, a frequent occurrence with him. However, everything went along as usual until 11 o'clock. Then Winkler became very uneasy. He looked constantly toward the door, compared his watch with the office clock, and sprang up impatiently as the special letter carrier, who usually comes about 11 with money orders, finally appeared."

"Then he was expecting money you think?"

"It must have been so. For as the letter carrier passed him, he called out: 'Haven't you anything for me?' and as the man shook his head Winkler seemed greatly disappointed and depressed. Before he left to go to lunch, he wrote a hasty letter, which he put in his pocket."

"He came in half an hour later than the rest of us. He had often been reprimanded for his lack of punctuality, but it seemed to do no good. He was almost

always late. Monday was no exception, although he was later than usual that day."

"And what sort of a mood was he in when he came back?"

"He was irritable and depressed. He seemed to be awaiting a message which did not come. His excitement hindered him from working, he scarcely did anything the entire afternoon. Finally at five o'clock a messenger boy came with a letter for him. I saw that Winkler turned pale as he took the note in his hand. It seemed to be only a few words written hastily on a card, thrust into an envelope. Winkler's teeth were set as he opened the letter. The messenger had already gone away."

"Did you notice his number?" asked Dr. von Riedau.

"No, I scarcely noticed the man at all. I was looking at Winkler, whose behaviour was so peculiar. When he read the card his face brightened. He read it through once more, then he tore both card and envelope into little bits and threw the pieces out of the open window."

"Then he evidently did not want anybody to see the contents of this note," said a voice from the corner of the room.

Fritz Bormann looked around astonished and rather doubtful at the little man who had risen from his chair and now came forward. Without waiting for an answer from the clerk, the other continued: "Did Winkler have money sent him frequently?"

Bormann looked inquiringly at the commissioner, who replied with a smile: "You may answer. Answer anything that Mr. Muller has to ask of you, as he is in charge of this case."

"As far as I can remember, it happened three times," was Bormann's answer.

"How close together?"



"Why—about once in every three or four months, I think."

"That looks almost like a regular income," exclaimed Riedau. His eyes met Muller's, which were lit up in sudden fire. "Well, what are you thinking of?" asked the commissioner.

"A woman," answered Muller; and continued more as if thinking aloud than as if addressing the others: "Winkler was a good-looking man. Might he not have had a rich love somewhere? Might not the money have come from her, the money that was found in his pocket?" Muller's voice trailed off into indistinctness at the last words, and the fire died out of his eyes. Then he laughed aloud.

The commissioner smiled also, a good-natured smile, such as one would give to a child who has been over-eager. "It doesn't matter to us where the money came from. All that matters here is where the bullet came from—the bullet which prevented his enjoying this money. And it is of more interest to us to find out who robbed him of his life and his property, rather than the source from which this property came."

The commissioner's tone was friendly, but Muller's face flushed red, and his head dropped. Riedau turned to Bormann and continued: "And because it is of no interest to us where his money came from—for it can have nothing whatever to do with his murder and the subsequent robbery—therefore what you noticed of his behaviour cannot be of any importance or bearing in the case in any way. Unless, indeed, you should find out anything more. But we appreciate the thoughtfulness of yourself and your employer and your readiness to help us."

Bormann rose to leave, but the commissioner put out a hand to stop him. "A few moments more, please; you may know of something else that will be

of assistance to us. We have heard that Winkler boasted of his belongings—did he talk about his private affairs in any way?”

“No, sir, I do not think he did.”

“You say that he destroyed the note at once, evidently realising that no one must see it—this note may have been a promise for the money which had not yet come. Did he, however, tell any one later that he expected a certain sum? Do you think he would have been likely to tell any one?”

“No, I do not think that he would tell any one. He never mentioned to any of us that he had received money, or even that he expected to receive it. None of us knew what outside resources he might have, or whence they came. If it had not been that the money was paid him by the carrier in the office two or three times—so that we could see it—we would none of us have known of this income, except for the fact that he was freer in spending after the money came. He would dine at expensive restaurants, and this fact he would mention to us, whereas at other times he would go to the cheap café.”

“Do you know anything about the people he was acquainted with outside the office?”

“No, sir. I seldom met him outside of the office. One evening it did happen that I saw him at Ronacher’s. He was there with a lady—that is, a so-called ‘lady’—and it must have been one of the times that he had money, for they were enjoying an expensive supper. At other times, some of the other clerks met him at various resorts, always with the same sort of woman. But not always with the same woman, for they were different in appearance.”

“He was never seen anywhere with other men?”

“No, sir; at least not by any of us.”

“He was not liked in the office?”

“No.” Bormann’s answer was sharp.

"For what reason?"

"I don't know; we just didn't like him. We had very little to do with him at first because of this, and soon we noticed that he seemed just as anxious to avoid us as we were to avoid him."

The commissioner rose and Bormann followed his example. "I am very sorry, sir, if I have taken up your time to no purpose," said the latter modestly, as he took up his hat.

"I am not so sure that what you have said may not be of great value to us," said a voice behind them. Muller stood there, looking at Riedau with a glance almost of defiance. His eyes were again lit up with the strange fire that shone in them when he was on the trail. The commissioner shrugged his shoulders, bowed to the departing visitor, and then turned without an answer to some documents on his desk. There was silence in the room for a few moments. Finally a gentle voice came from Muller's corner again: "Dr. von Riedau?" The commissioner raised his head and looked around. "Oh, are you still there?" he asked with a drawl.

Muller knew what this drawl meant. It was the manner adopted by the amiable commissioner when he was in a mood which was not amiable. And Muller knew also the cause of the mood. It was his own last remark, the words he addressed to Bormann. Muller himself recognised the fact that this remark was out of place, that it was almost an impertinence, because it was in direct contradiction to a statement made a few moments before by his superior officer. Also he realised that his remark had been quite unnecessary, because it was a matter of indifference to the young man, who was only obeying his employer's orders in reporting what he had seen, whether his report was of value or not. Muller had simply uttered aloud the thought that came into his mind, a habit of

his which years of official training had not yet succeeded in breaking. It was annoying to himself sometimes, for these half-formed thoughts were mere instinct—they were the workings of his own genius that made him catch a suspicion of the truth long before his conscious mind could reason it out or appreciate its value. But that sort of thing was not popular in official police life.

"Well," asked the commissioner, as Muller did not continue, "your tongue is not usually so slow—as you have proved just a few moments back—what were you going to say now?"

"I was about to ask your pardon for my interruption. It was unnecessary, I should not have said it."

"Well, I realise that you know better yourself," said Riedau, now quite friendly again, "and now what else have you to say? Do you really think that what the young man has just told us is of any value at all for this case?"

"It seems to me as if it might be of value to us."

"Oh, it *seems* to you, eh? Your imagination is working overtime again, Muller," said the commissioner with a laugh. But the laugh turned to seriousness as he realised how many times Muller's imagination had helped the clumsy official mind to its proudest triumphs. The commissioner was an intelligent man, as far as his lights went, and he was a good-hearted man. He rose from his chair and walked over to where the detective stood. "You needn't look so embarrassed, Muller," he said. "There is no cause for you to feel bad about it. And—I am quite willing to admit that *my* remark just now was unnecessary. You may give your imagination full rein, we can trust to your intelligence and your devotion to duty to keep it from unnecessary flights. So curbed, I know it will be of as much assistance to us this time as it always has been."

Muller's quiet face lit up, and his eyes shone in a happiness that made him appear ten years younger. That was one of the strange things about Joseph Muller. This genius in his profession was in all other ways a man of such simplicity of heart and bearing, that the slightest word of approval from one of the officials for whom he worked could make him as happy as praise from the teacher will make a school-boy. The moments when he was in command of any difficult case, when these same superiors would wait for a word from him, when high officials would take his orders or would be obliged to acknowledge that without him they were helpless, these moments were forgotten as soon as the problem was solved and Muller became again the simple subordinate and the obscure member of the Imperial police force.

When Muller left the commissioner's room and walked through the outer office, one of the clerks looked after him and whispered to his companion: "Do you think he's found the Hietzing murderer yet?" The other answered: "I don't think so, but he looks as if he had found a clue. He'll find him sooner or later. He always does."

Muller did not hear these words, although they also would have pleased him. He walked slowly down the stairs murmuring to himself: "I think I was right just the same. We are following a false trail."

## CHAPTER V

### BY A THREAD

It was on Monday, the 27th of September, that Leopold Winkler was murdered and robbed, and early on Tuesday, the 28th, his body was found. That day the evening papers printed the report of the murder

and the description of the dead man, and on Wednesday, the 29th, Mrs. Klingmayer read the news and went to see Winkler's employer. By noon of that day the body was identified and a description of the stolen purse and watch telegraphed to police headquarters in various cities. A few hours later, these police stations had sent out notices by messenger to all pawnshops and dealers in second-hand clothing, and now the machinery of the law sat waiting for some news of an attempt on the part of the robber—and murderer—to get rid of his plunder.

On this same Wednesday, about the twilight hour, David Goldstamm, dealer in second-hand clothing, stood before the door of his shop in a side street of the old Hungarian city of Pressburg and watched his assistant take down the clothes which were hanging outside and carry them into the store. The old man's eyes glanced carelessly up and down the street and caught sight of a man who turned the corner and came hurrying towards him. This man was a very seedy-looking individual. An old faded overcoat hung about his thin figure, and a torn and dusty hat fell over his left eye. He seemed also to be much the worse for liquor and very wobbly on his feet. And yet he seemed anxious to hurry onward in spite of the unevenness of his walk.

Then he slowed up suddenly, glanced across the street to Goldstamm's store, and crossed over.

"Have you any boots for me?" he asked, sticking out his right foot that the dealer might see whether he had anything the requisite size.

"I think there's something there," answered the old man in his usual businesslike tone, leading the way into the store.

The stranger followed. Goldstamm lit the one light in the little place and groped about in an untidy heap of shoes of all kinds and sizes until he found

several pairs that he thought might fit. These he brought out and put them in front of his customer. But in spite of his bleary eyes, the man caught sight of some patches on the uppers of one pair, and pushed them away from him.

"Give me something better than that. I can pay for it. I don't have to wear 'patched shoes,'" he grunted.

Goldstamm didn't like the looks of the man, but he felt that he had better be careful and not make him angry. "Have patience, sir, I'll find you something better," he said gently, tossing the heap about again, but now keeping his face turned towards his customer.

"I want a coat also and a warm pair of trousers," said the stranger in a rough voice. He bent down to loosen the shabby boot from his right foot, and as he did so something fell out of the pocket of his coat. An unconscious motion of his own raised foot struck this small object and tossed it into the middle of the heap of shoes close by Goldstamm's hand. The old man reached out after it and caught it. It was just an ordinary brown leather pocketbook, of medium size, old and shabby, like a thousand others. But the eyes of the little old man widened as if in terror, his face turned pale and his hands trembled. For he had seen, hanging from one side of this worn brown leather pocketbook, the end of a yellow thread, the loosened end of the thread with which one side of the purse was mended. The thread told David Goldstamm who it was that had come into his shop.

He regained his control with a desperate effort of the will. It took him but a few seconds to do so, and, thanks to his partial intoxication, the customer had not noticed the shopkeeper's start of alarm. But he appeared anxious and impatient to regain possession of his purse.

"Haven't you found it yet?" he exclaimed.

Goldstamm hastened to give it back. The tramp put the purse in his pocket with a sigh of relief. Goldstamm had regained his calm and his mind was working eagerly. He put several pairs of shoes before his customer, with the remark: "You must try them on. We'll find something to suit you. And meanwhile I will bring in several pairs of trousers from those outside. I have some fine coats to show you too."

Goldstamm went out to the door, almost colliding there with his assistant who was coming in with his arm full of garments. The old man motioned to the boy, who retreated until they were both hidden from the view of the man within the store.

"Give me those blue trousers there," said Goldstamm in a loud voice. Then in a whisper he said to the boy: "Run to the police station. The man with the watch and the purse is in there."

The boy understood and set off at once at a fast pace, while the old man returned to his store with a heavy heart. He wondered whether he would be able to keep the murderer there until the police could come. And he also wondered what it might cost *him*, an old and feeble man, who would be as a weak reed in the hands of the strong tramp in there. But he knew it was his duty to do whatever he could to help in the arrest of one who had just taken the life of a fellow creature. The realisation of this gave the old man strength and calmness.

"A nice sort of an eye for size you have," cried the tramp as the old man came up to him. "I suppose you've brought me in a boy's suit? What do you take me for? Any girl could go to a ball in the shoes you brought me to try on here."

"Are they so much too small?" asked the dealer in an innocent tone. "Well, there's plenty more



there. And perhaps you had better be trying on this suit behind the curtain here while I'm hunting up the shoes."

This suggestion seemed to please the stranger, as he was evidently in a hurry. He passed in behind the curtain and began to undress. Goldstamm's keen eyes watched him through a crack. There was not much to be seen except that the tramp seemed anxious to keep his overcoat within reach of his hand. He had carefully put the purse in one of its pockets.

"We'll get the things all together pretty soon," said the dealer. "I've found a pair of boots here, fine boots of good quality, and sure to fit."

"Stop your talk," growled the other, "and come here and help me so that I can get away."

Goldstamm came forward, and though his heart was very heavy within him, he aided this man, this man about whom so many hundreds were now thinking in terror, as calmly as he had aided his other poor but *honest* customers.

With hands that did not tremble, the dealer busied himself about his customer, listening all the while to sounds in the street in the hope that his tête-à-tête with the murderer would soon be over. But in spite of all his natural anxiety, the old man's sharp eyes took cognizance of various things, one of which was that the man whom he was helping to dress in his new clothes did not have the watch which was described in the police notice. This fact, however, did not make the old man's heart any lighter, for the purse mended with yellow thread was too clearly the one stolen from the murdered man found in the quiet street in Hietzing.

"What's the matter with you, you're so slow? I can get along better myself," growled the tramp, pushing the old man away from him. Goldstamm

had really begun to tremble now in spite of his control, in the fear that the man would get away from him before the police came.

The tramp was already dressed in the new suit, into a pocket of which he put the old purse.

"There, now the boots and then we're finished," said the dealer with an attempt at a smile. In his heart he prayed that the pair he now held in his hand might not fit, that he might gain a few minutes more. But the shoes did fit. A little pushing and stamping and the man was ready to leave the store. He was evidently in a hurry, for he paid what was asked without any attempt to bargain. Had Goldstamm not known whom he had before him now, he would have been very much astonished at this, and might perhaps have been sorry that he had not named a higher sum. But under the circumstances he understood only too well the man's desire to get away, and would much rather have had some talk as to the payment, anything that would keep his customer a little longer in his store.

"There, now we're ready. I'll pack up your old things for you. Or perhaps we can make a deal for them. I pay the highest prices in the city," said Goldstamm, with an apparent eagerness which he hoped would deceive the customer.

But the man had already turned towards the door, and called back over his shoulder: "You can keep the old things, I don't want them."

As he spoke he opened the door of the store and stood face to face with a policeman holding a revolver. He turned, with a curse, back into the room, but the dealer was nowhere to be seen. David Goldstamm had done his duty to the public, in spite of his fear. Now, seeing that the police had arrived, he could think of his duty to his family. This duty was plainly to save his own life, and when the tramp

turned again to look for him, he had disappeared out of the back door.

"Not a move or I will shoot," cried the policeman, and now two others appeared behind him, and came into the store. But the tramp made no attempt to escape. He stood pale and trembling while they put the handcuffs on him, and let them take him away without any resistance. He was put on the evening express for Vienna, and taken to Police Headquarters in that city. He made no protest nor any attempt to escape, but he refused to utter a word on the entire journey.

## CHAPTER VI

### ALMOST CONVICTED

THE evening was already far gone when Muller entered Riedau's office.

"You're in time, the man isn't here yet. The train is evidently late," said the commissioner. "We're working this case off quickly. We will have the murderer here in half an hour at the latest. He did not have much time to enjoy the stolen property. He was here in Vienna this morning, and was arrested in Pressburg this afternoon. Here is the telegram, read it."

Dr. von Riedau handed Muller the message. The commissioner was evidently pleased and excited. The telegram read as follows: "Man arrested here in possession of described purse containing four ten guilder notes and four guildens in silver. Arrested in store of second-hand clothes dealer Goldstamm. Will arrive this evening in Vienna under guard."

The message was signed by the Chief of the Pressburg police.

Muller laid the paper on the desk without a word.

There was a watch on this desk already; it was a heavy gold watch, unusually thick, with the initials L. W. on the cover. Just as Muller laid down the telegram, a door outside was opened and the commissioner covered the watch hastily. There was a loud knock at his own door and an attendant entered to announce that the party from Pressburg had arrived. He was followed by one of the Pressburg police force, who brought the official report.

"Did you have any difficulty with him?" asked the commissioner.

"Oh, no, sir; it was a very easy job. He made no resistance at all, and he seems to be quite sober now. But he hasn't said a word since we arrested him."

Then followed the detailed report of the arrest, and the delivery of the described pocketbook to the commissioner.

"Is that all?" asked Dr. von Riedau.

"Yes, sir."

"Then you may go home now, we will take charge of the man."

The policeman bowed and left the room. A few moments later the tramp was brought in, guarded by two armed roundsmen. His guards remained at the door, while the prisoner himself walked forward to the middle of the room. Commissioner von Riedau sat at his desk, his clerk beside him ready to take down the evidence. Muller sat near a window with a paper on his lap, looking the least interested of anybody in the proceedings.

For a moment there was complete silence in the room, which was broken in a rather unusual manner. A deep voice, more like a growl, although it had a queer strain of comic good-nature in it, began the proceedings with the remark: "Well now, say, what do you want of me, anyway?"

The commissioner looked at the man in astonishment, then turned aside that the prisoner might not notice his smile. But he might have spared himself the trouble, for Muller, the clerk, and the two policemen at the door were all on a broad grin.

Then the commissioner pulled himself together again, and began with his usual official gravity: "It is I who ask questions here. Is it possible that you do not know this? You look to me as if you had had experience in police courts before." The commissioner gazed at the prisoner with eyes that were not altogether friendly. The tramp seemed to feel this, and his own eyes dropped, while the good-natured impertinence in his bearing disappeared. It was evidently the last remains of his intoxication. He was now quite sober.

"What is your name?" asked the commissioner.

"Johann Knoll."

"Where were you born?"

"Near Brunn."

"Your age?"

"I'm—I'll be forty next Christmas."

"Your religion?"

"Well, you can see I'm no Jew, can't you?"

"You will please answer my questions in a proper manner. This impertinence will not make things easier for you."

"All right, sir," said the tramp humbly. "I am a Catholic."

"You have been in prison before?" This was scarcely a question.

"No, sir," said Knoll firmly.

"What is your business?"

"I don't know what to say, sir," answered Knoll, shrugging his shoulders. "I've done a lot of things in my life. I'm a cattle drover and a lumber man, and I——"

"Did you learn any trade?"

"No, sir, I never learned anything."

"Do you mean to tell me that without having learned any trade you've gotten through life thus far honestly?"

"Oh, I've worked hard enough—I've worked good and hard sometimes."

"The last few days particularly, eh?"

"Why, no, sir, not these last days—I was drover on a transport of pigs; we brought 'em down from Hungary, 200 of 'em, to the slaughter house here."

"When was that?"

"That was—that was Monday."

"This last Monday?"

"Yes, sir."

"And then you went to Hietzing?"

"Yes, sir, that's right."

"Why did you go to Hietzing?"

"Why, see here, sir, if I had gone to Ottakring, then I suppose you would have asked why did I go to Ottakring. I just went to Hietzing. A fellow has to go somewhere. *You* don't stay in the same spot all the time, do you?"

Again the commissioner turned his head and another smile went through the room. This Hietzing murderer had a sense of humour.

"Well, then, we'll go to Hietzing again, in our minds at least," said the commissioner, turning back to Knoll when he had controlled his merriment. "You went there on Monday, then—and the day was coming to an end. What did you do when you reached Hietzing?"

"I looked about for a place to sleep."

"Where did you look for a place to sleep?"

"Why, in Hietzing."

"That is not definite enough."

"Well, in a garden."

"You were trespassing, you mean?"

"Why, yes, sir. There wasn't anybody that seemed to want to invite me to dinner or to give me a place to sleep. I just had to look out for myself."

"You evidently know how to look out for yourself at the cost of others, a heavy cost." The commissioner's easy tone had changed to sternness. Knoll felt this, and a sharp gleam shot out from his dull little eyes, while the tone of his voice was gruff and impertinent again as he asked: "What do you mean by that?"

"You know well enough. You had better not waste any more time, but tell us at once how you came into possession of this purse."

"It's my purse," Knoll answered with calm impertinence. "I got it the way most people get it. I bought it."

"*This purse?*" the commissioner emphasised both words distinctly.

"*This purse*—yes," answered the tramp with a perfect imitation of Riedau's voice. "Why shouldn't I have bought *this purse* just like any other?"

"Because you stole this purse from the man whom you—murdered," was the commissioner's reply.

There was another moment of dead silence in the room. The commissioner and Muller watched intently for any change of expression in the face of the man who had just had such an accusation hurled at him. Even the clerk and the two policemen at the door were interested to see what would happen.

Knoll's calm impertinence vanished, a deadly pallor spread over his face, and he seemed frozen to stone. He attempted to speak, but was not able to control his voice. His hands were clenched and tremors shook his gaunt but strong-muscled frame.

"When did I murder anybody?" he gasped finally

in a hoarse croak. "You'll have to prove it to me that I am a murderer."

"That is easily proved. Here is one of the proofs," said Riedau coldly, pointing to the purse. "The purse and the watch of the murdered man are fatal witnesses against you."

"The watch? I haven't any watch. Where should I get a watch?"

"You didn't have one until Monday, possibly; I can believe that. But you were in possession of a watch between the evening of Monday, the 27th, and the morning of Wednesday, the 29th."

Knoll's eyes dropped again and he did not trust himself to speak.

"Well, you do not deny this statement?"

"No, I can't," said Knoll, still trying to control his voice. "You must have the watch yourself now, or else you wouldn't be so certain about it."

"Ah, you see, I thought you'd had experience with police courts before," said the commissioner amiably. "Of course I have the watch already. The man whom you sold it to this morning knew by three o'clock this afternoon where this watch came from. He brought it here at once and gave us your description. A very exact description. The man will be brought here to identify you to-morrow. We must send for him anyway, to return his money to him. He paid you fifty-two gulden for the watch. And how much money was in the purse that you took from the murdered man?"

"Three gulden eighty-five."

"That was a very small sum for which to commit a murder."

Knoll groaned and bit his lips until they bled.

Commissioner von Riedau raised the paper that covered the watch and continued: "You presumably recognised that the chain on which this watch hung



was valueless, also that it could easily be recognised. Did you throw it away, or have you it still?"

"I threw it in the river."

"That will not make any difference. We do not need the chain, we have quite enough evidence without it. The purse, for instance: you thought, I suppose, that it was just a purse like a thousand others, but it is not. This purse is absolutely individual and easily recognised, because it is mended in one spot with yellow thread. The thread has become loosened and hangs down in a very noticeable manner. It was this yellow thread on the purse, which he happened to see by chance, that showed the dealer Goldstamm who it was that had entered his store."

Knoll stood quite silent, staring at the floor. Drops of perspiration stood out on his forehead, some of them rolling like tears down his cheek.

The commissioner rose from his seat and walked slowly to where the prisoner stood. He laid one hand on the man's shoulder and said in a voice that was quite gentle and kind again: "Johann Knoll, do not waste your time, or ours, in thinking up useless lies. You are almost convicted of this crime now. You have already acknowledged so much, that there is but little more for you to say. If you make an open confession, it will be greatly to your advantage."

Again the room was quiet while the others waited for what would happen. For a moment the tramp stood silent, with the commissioner's right hand resting on his shoulder. Then there was a sudden movement, a struggle and a shout, and the two policemen had overpowered the prisoner and held him firmly. Muller rose quickly and sprang to his chief's side. Riedau had not even changed colour, and he said calmly: "Oh, never mind, Muller; sit down again. The man had handcuffs on and he is quite quiet now."

I think he has sense enough to see that he is only harming himself by his violence."

The commissioner returned to his desk and Muller went back to his chair by the window. The prisoner was quiet again, although his face wore a dark flush and the veins on throat and forehead were swollen thick. He trembled noticeably and the heavy drops besprinkled his brow.

"I—I have something to say, sir," he began, "but first I want to beg your pardon——"

"Oh, never mind that. I am not angry when a man is fighting for his life, even if he doesn't choose quite the right way," answered the commissioner calmly, playing with a lead pencil.

Knoll's expression was defiant now. He laughed harshly and began again: "What I'm tellin' you now is the truth whether you believe it or not. I didn't kill the man. I took the watch and purse from him. I thought he was drunk. If he was killed, I didn't do it."

"He was killed by a shot."

"A shot? Why, yes, I heard a shot, but I didn't think any more about it, I didn't think there was anythin' doing, I thought somebody was shootin' a cat, or else——"

"Oh, don't bother to invent things. It was a man who was shot at, the man whom you robbed. But go on, go on. I am anxious to hear what you will tell me."

Knoll's hands clenched to fists and his eyes glowed in hate and defiance. Then he dropped them to the floor again and began to talk slowly in a monotonous tone that sounded as if he were repeating a lesson. His manner was rather unfortunate and did not tend to induce belief in the truth of his story. The gist of what he said was as follows:

He had reached Hietzing on Monday evening about

8 o'clock. He was thirsty, as usual, and had about two gulden in his possession, his wages for the last day's work. He turned into a tavern in Hietzing and ate and drank until his money was all gone, and he had not even enough left to pay for a night's lodging. But Knoll was not worried about that. He was accustomed to sleeping out of doors, and as this was a particularly fine evening, there was nothing in the prospect to alarm him. He set about finding a suitable place where he would not be disturbed by the guardians of the law. His search led him by chance into a newly opened street. This suited him exactly. The fences were easy to climb, and there were several little summer houses in sight which made much more agreeable lodgings than the ground under a bush. And above all, the street was so quiet and deserted that he knew it was just the place for him. He had never been in the street before, and did not know its name. He passed the four houses at the end of the street—he was on the left sidewalk—and then he came to two fenced-in building lots. These interested him. He was very agile, raised himself up on the fences easily and took stock of the situation. One of the lots did not appeal to him particularly, but the second one did. It bordered on a large garden, in the middle of which he could see a little house of some kind. It was after sunset but he could see things quite plainly yet for the air was clear and the moon was just rising. He saw also that in the vacant lot adjoining the garden, a lot which appeared to have been a garden itself once, there was a sort of shed. It looked very much damaged but appeared to offer shelter sufficient for a fine night.

The shed stood on a little raise of the ground near the high iron fence that protected the large garden. Knoll decided that the shed would make a good place to spend the night. He climbed the fence easily and

walked across the lot. When he was just settling himself for his nap, he heard the clock on a near-by church strike nine. The various drinks he had had for supper put him in a mood that would not allow him to get to sleep at once. The bench in the old shed was decidedly rickety and very uncomfortable, and as he was tossing about to find a good position, a thought came into his mind which he acknowledged was not a commendable one. It occurred to him that if he pursued his investigations in the neighbourhood a little further, he might be able to pick up something that would be of advantage to him on his wanderings. His eyes and his thoughts were directed towards the handsome house which he could see beyond the trees of the old garden.

The moon was now well up in the sky and it shone brightly on the mansard roof of the fine old mansion. The windows of the long wing which stretched out towards the garden glistened in the moonbeams, and the light coloured wall of the house made a bright background for the dark mask of trees waving gently in the night breeze. Knoll's little shed was sufficiently raised on its hillock for him to have a good view of the garden. There was no door to the shed and he could see the neighbouring property clearly from where he lay on his bench. While he lay there watching, he saw a woman walking through the garden. He could see her only when she passed back of or between the lower shrubs and bushes. As far as he could see, she came from the main building and was walking towards a pretty little house which lay in the centre of the garden. Knoll had imagined this house to be the gardener's dwelling and as it lay quite dark he supposed the inmates were either asleep or out for the evening. It had been this house which he was intending to honour by a visit. But seeing the woman walking towards it, he decided it

would not be safe to carry out his plan just yet awhile.

A few moments later he was certain that this last decision had been a wise one, for he saw a man come from the main building and walk along the path the woman had taken. "No, nothing doing there," thought Knoll, and concluded he had better go to sleep. He could not remember just how long he may have dozed but it seemed to him that during that time he had heard a shot. It did not interest him much. He supposed some one was shooting at a thieving cat or at some small night animal. He did not even remember whether he had been really sound asleep, before he was aroused by the breaking down of the bench on which he lay. The noise of it more than the shock of the short fall, awoke him and he sprang up in alarm and listened intently to hear whether any one had been attracted by it. His first glance was towards the building behind the garden. There was no sound nor no light in the garden house but there was a light in the main building. While the tramp was wondering what hour it might be, the church clock answered him by ten loud strokes.

His head was already aching from the wine and he did not feel comfortable in the drafty old building. He came out from it, crept along to the spot where he had climbed the fence before, and after listening carefully and hearing nothing on either side, he climbed back to the road. The street lay silent and empty, which was just what he was hoping for. He held carefully to the shadow thrown by the high board fence over which he had climbed until he came to its end. Then he remembered that he hadn't done anything wrong and stepped out boldly into the moonlight. The moon was well up now and the street was almost as light as day. Knoll was attracted by the queer shadows thrown by a big elder

tree, waving its long branches in the wind. As he came nearer he saw that part of the shadow was no shadow at all but was the body of a man lying in the street near the bush. "I thought sure he was drunk" was the way Knoll described it. "I've been like that myself often until somebody came along and found me."

When he came to this spot in his story, he halted and drew a long breath. Commissioner von Riedau had begun to make some figures on the paper in front of him, then changed the lines until the head of a pretty woman in a fur hat took shape under his fingers.

"Well, go on," he said, looking with interest at his drawing and improving it with several quick strokes.

Johann Knoll continued:

"Then the devil came over me and I thought I better take this good opportunity—well—I did. The man was lying on his back and I saw a watch chain on his dark vest. I bent over him and took his watch and chain. Then I felt around in his pocket and found his purse. And then—well then I felt sorry for him lying out in the open road like that, and I thought I'd lift him up and put him somewhere where he could sleep it off more convenient. But I didn't see there was a little ditch there and I stumbled over it and dropped him. 'It's a good thing he's so drunk that even this don't wake him up,' I thought, and ran off. Then I thought I heard something moving and I was scared stiff, but there was nothing in the street at all. I thought I had better take to the fields though and I crossed through some corn and then out onto another street. Finally I walked into the city, stayed there till this morning, sold the watch, then went to Pressburg."

"So that was the way it was," said the commis-

sioner, pushing his drawing away from him and motioning to the policemen at the door. "You may take this man away now," he added in a voice of cool indifference, without looking at the prisoner.

Knoll's head drooped and he walked out quietly between his two guards. The clock on the office wall struck eleven.

"Dear me! what a lot of time the man wasted," said the commissioner, putting the report of the proceedings, the watch and the purse in a drawer of his desk. "When anybody has been almost convicted of a crime, it's really quite unnecessary to invent such a long story."

A few minutes later, the room was empty and Muller, as the last of the group, walked slowly down the stairs. He was in such a brown study that he scarcely heard the commissioner's friendly "good-night," nor did he notice that he was walking down the quiet street under a star-gilded sky. "Almost convicted—*almost*. *Almost?*" Muller's lips murmured while his head was full of a chaotic rush of thought, dim pictures that came and went, something that seemed to be on the point of bringing light into the darkness, then vanishing again. "Almost—but not quite. There is something here I must find out first. What is it? I must know——"

## CHAPTER VII

### THE FACE AT THE GATE

THE second examination of the prisoner brought nothing new. Johann Knoll refused to speak at all, or else simply repeated what he had said before. This second examination took place early the next morning, but Muller was not present. He was taking a walk in Hietzing.

When they took Johann Knoll in the police wagon to the City Prison, Muller was just sauntering slowly through the street where the murder had been committed. And as the door of the cell shut clangingly behind the man whose face was distorted in impotent rage and despair, Joseph Muller was standing in deep thought before the broken willow twig, which now hung brown and dry across the planks of the fence. He looked at it for a long time. That is, he seemed to be looking at it, but in reality his eyes were looking out and beyond the willow twig, out into the unknown, where the unknown murderer was still at large. Leopold Winkler's body had already been committed to the earth. How long will it be before his death is avenged? Or perhaps how long may it even be before it is discovered from what motive this murder was committed. Was it a murder for robbery, or a murder for personal revenge perhaps? Were the two crimes committed here by one and the same person, or were there two people concerned? And if two, did they work as accomplices? Or is it possible that Knoll's story was true? Did he really only rob the body, not realising that it was a dead man and not merely an intoxicated sleeper as he had supposed? These and many more thoughts rushed tumultuously through Muller's brain until he sighed despairingly under the pressure. Then he smiled in amusement at the wish that had crossed his brain, the wish that this case might seem as simple to him as it apparently did to the commissioner. It would certainly have saved him a lot of work and trouble if he could believe the obvious as most people did. What was this devil that rode him and spurred him on to delve into the hidden facts concerning matters that seemed so simple on the surface? The devil that spurred him on to understand that there always was some hidden side to every



case? Then the sigh and the smile passed, and Muller raised his head in one of the rare moments of pride in his own gifts that this shy unassuming little man ever allowed himself. This was the work that he was intended by Providence to do or he wouldn't have been fitted for it, and it was work for the common good, for the public safety. Thinking back over the troubles of his early youth, Muller's heart rejoiced and he was glad in his own genius. Then the moment of unwonted elation passed and he bent his mind again to the problem before him.

He sauntered slowly through the quiet street in the direction of the four houses. To reach them he passed the fence that enclosed this end of the Thorne property. Muller had already known, for the last twenty-four hours at least, that the owner of the fine old estate was an artist by the name of Herbert Thorne. His own landlady had informed him of this. He himself was new to the neighbourhood, having moved out there recently, and he had verified her statements by the city directory. As he was now passing the Thorne property, in his slow, sauntering walk, he had just come within a dozen paces of the little wooden gate in the fence when this gate opened. Muller's naturally soft tread was made still more noiseless by the fact that he wore wide soft shoes. Years before he had acquired a bad case of chilblains, in fact had been in imminent danger of having his feet frozen by standing for five hours in the snow in front of a house, to intercept several aristocratic gentlemen who sooner or later would be obliged to leave that house. The police had long suspected the existence of this high-class gambling den; but it was not until they had put Muller in charge of the case, that there were any results attained. The arrests were made at the risk of permanent injury to the celebrated detective. Since then, Muller's step was more noiseless than

usual, and now the woman who opened the gate and peered out cautiously did not hear his approach nor did she see him standing in the shadow of the fence. She looked towards the other end of the street, then turned and spoke to somebody behind her. "There's nobody coming from that direction," she said. Then she turned her head the other way and saw Muller. She looked at him for a moment and slammed the gate shut, disappearing behind it. Muller heard the lock click and heard the beat of running feet hastening rapidly over the gravel path through the garden.

The detective stood immediately in front of the gate, shaking his head. "What was the matter with the woman? What was it that she wanted to see or do in the street? Why should she run away when she saw me?" These were his thoughts. But he didn't waste time in merely thinking. Muller never did. Action followed thought with him very quickly. He saw a knot-hole in the fence just beside the gate and he applied his eyes to this knot-hole. And through the knot-hole he saw something that interested and surprised him.

The woman whose face had appeared so suddenly at the gate, and disappeared still more suddenly, was the same woman whom he had seen bidding farewell to Mr. Thorne and his wife on the Tuesday morning previous, the woman whom he took to be the house-keeper. The old butler stood beside her. It was undoubtedly the same man, although he had worn a livery then and was now dressed in a comfortable old house coat. He stood beside the woman, shaking his head and asking her just the questions that Muller was asking himself at the moment.

"Why, what is the matter with you, Mrs. Bernauer? You're so nervous since yesterday. Are you ill? Everything seems to frighten you? Why did you

run away from that gate so suddenly? I thought you wanted me to show you the place?"

Mrs. Bernauer raised her head and Muller saw that her face looked pale and haggard and that her eyes shone with an uneasy feverish light. She did not answer the old man's questions, but made a gesture of farewell and then turned and walked slowly towards the house. She realised, apparently, and feared, perhaps, that the man who was passing the gate might have noticed her sudden change of demeanour and that he was listening to what she might say. She did not think of the knot-hole in the board fence, or she might have been more careful in hiding her distraught face from possible observers.

Muller stood watching through this knot-hole for some little time. He took a careful observation of the garden, and from his point of vantage he could easily see the little house which was apparently the dwelling of the gardener, as well as the mansard roof of the main building. There was considerable distance between the two houses. The detective decided that it might interest him to know something more about this garden, this house and the people who lived there. And when Muller made such a decision it was usually not very long before he carried it out.

The other street, upon which the main front of the mansard house opened, contained a few isolated dwellings surrounded by gardens and a number of newly built apartment houses. On the ground floor of these latter houses were a number of stores and immediately opposite the Thorne mansion was a little café. This suited Muller exactly, for he had been there before and he remembered that from one of the windows there was an excellent view of the gate and the front entrance of the mansion opposite. It was a very modest little café, but there was a fairly

good wine to be had there and the detective made it an excuse to sit down by the window, as if enjoying his bottle while admiring the changing colours of the foliage in the gardens opposite.

Another rather good chance, he discovered, was the fact that the landlord belonged to the talkative sort, and believed that the refreshments he had to sell were rendered doubly agreeable when spiced by conversation. In this case the good man was not mistaken. It was scarcely ten o'clock in the forenoon and there were very few people in the café. The landlord was quite at leisure to devote himself to this stranger in the window seat, whom he did not remember to have seen before, and who was therefore doubly interesting to him. Several subjects of conversation usual in such cases, such as politics and the weather, seemed to arouse no particular enthusiasm in his patron's manner. Finally the portly landlord decided that he would touch upon the theme which was still absorbing all Hietzing.

"Oh, by the way, sir, do you know that you are in the immediate vicinity of the place where the murder of Monday evening was committed? People are still talking about it around here. And I see by the papers that the murderer was arrested in Pressburg yesterday and brought to Vienna last night."

"Indeed, is that so? I haven't seen a paper to-day," replied Muller, awakening from his apparent indifference.

The landlord was flattered by the success of the new subject, and stood ready to unloose the flood-gates of his eloquence. His customer sat up and asked the question for which the landlord was waiting.

"So it was around here that the man was shot?"

"Yes. His name was Leopold Winkler, that was in the papers to-day too. You see that pretty house op-

posite? Well, right behind this house is the garden that belongs to it and back of that, an old garden which has been neglected for some time. It was at the end of this garden where it touches the other street, that they found the man under a big elder-tree, early Tuesday morning, day before yesterday."

"Oh, indeed!" said Muller, greatly interested, as if this was the first he had heard of it. The landlord took a deep breath and was about to begin again when his customer, who decided to keep the talkative man to a certain phase of the subject, now took command of the conversation himself.

"I should think that the people opposite, who live so near the place where the murder was committed, wouldn't be very much pleased," he said. "I shouldn't care to look out on such a spot every time I went to my window."

"There aren't any windows there," exclaimed the landlord, "for there aren't any houses there. There's only the old garden, and then the large garden and the park belonging to Mr. Thorne's house, that fine old house you see just opposite here. It's a good thing that Mr. Thorne and his wife went away before the murder became known. The lady hasn't been well for some weeks, she's very nervous and frail, and it probably would have frightened her to think that such things were happening right close to her home."

"The lady is sick? What's the matter with her?"

"Goodness knows, nerves, heart trouble, something like that. The things these fine ladies are always having. But she wasn't always that way, not until about a year ago. She was fresh and blooming and very pretty to look at before that."

"She is a young lady then?"

"Yes, indeed, sir; she's very young still and very pretty. It makes you feel sorry to see her so miser-

able, and you feel sorry for her husband. Now there's a young couple with everything in the world to make them happy and so fond of each other, and the poor little lady has to be so sick."

"They are very happy, you say?" asked Muller carelessly. He had no particular set purpose in following up this inquiry, none but his usual understanding of the fact that a man in his business can never amass too much knowledge, and that it will sometimes happen that a chance bit of information comes in very handy.

The landlord was pleased at the encouragement and continued: "Indeed they are very happy. They've only been married two years. The lady comes from a distance, from Graz. Her father is an army officer I believe, and I don't think she was over-rich. But she's a very sweet-looking lady and her rich husband is very fond of her, any one can see that."

"You said just now that they had gone away, where have they gone to?"

"They've gone to Italy, sir. Mrs. Thorne was one of the few people who do not know Venice. Franz, that's the butler, sir, told me yesterday evening that he had received a telegram saying that the lady and gentleman had arrived safely and were very comfortably fixed in the Hotel Danieli. You know Danieli's?"

"Yes, I do. I also was one of the few people who did not know Venice, that is I was until two years ago. Then, however, I had the pleasure of riding over the Bridge of Mestre," answered Muller. He did not add that he was not alone at the time, but had ridden across the long bridge in company with a pale haggard-faced man who did not dare to look to the right or to the left because of the revolver which he knew was held in the detective's hand under his loose overcoat. Muller's visit to Venice, like

most of his journeyings, had been one of business. This time to capture and bring home a notorious and long sought embezzler. He did not volunteer any of this information, however, but merely asked in a politely interested manner whether the landlord himself had been to Venice.

"Yes, indeed," replied the latter proudly. "I was head waiter at Bauer's for two years."

"Then you must make me some Italian dishes soon," said Muller. Further conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Franz, the old butler of the house opposite.

"Excuse me, sir; I must get him his glass of wine," said the landlord, hurrying away to the bar. He returned in a moment with a small bottle and a glass and set it down on Muller's table.

"You don't mind, sir, if he sits down here?" he asked. "He usually sits here at this table because then he can see if he is needed over at the house."

"Oh, please let him come here. He has prior rights to this table undoubtedly," said the stranger politely. The old butler sat down with an embarrassed murmur, as the voluble landlord explained that the stranger had no objection. Then the boniface hurried off to attend to some newly entered customers and the detective, greatly pleased at the prospect, found himself alone with the old servant.

"You come here frequently?" he began, to open the conversation.

"Yes, sir, since my master and myself have settled down here—we travelled most of the time until several years ago—I find this place very convenient. It's a cosy little room, the wine is good and not expensive, I'm near home and yet I can see some new faces occasionally."

"I hope the faces that you see about you at home

are not so unpleasant that you are glad to get away from them?" asked Muller with a smile.

The old man gave a start of alarm. "Oh, dear, no, sir," he exclaimed eagerly; "that wasn't what I meant. Indeed I'm fond of everybody in the house from our dear lady down to the poor little dog."

Here Muller gained another little bit of knowledge, the fact that the lady of the house was the favourite of her servants, or that she seemed to them even more an object of adoration than the master.

"Then you evidently have a very good place, since you seem so fond of every one."

"Indeed I have a good place, sir."

"You've had this place a long time?"

"More than twenty years. My master was only eleven years old when I took service with the family."

"Ah, indeed! then you must be a person of importance in the house if you have been there so long?"

"Well more or less I might say I am," the old man smiled and looked flattered, then added: "But the housekeeper, Mrs. Bernauer, is even more important than I am, to tell you the truth. She was nurse to our present young master, and she's been in the house ever since. When his parents died, it's some years ago now, she took entire charge of the housekeeping. She was a fine active woman then, and now the young master and mistress couldn't get along without her. They treat her as if she was one of the family."

"And she is ill also? I say *also*," explained Muller, "because the landlord has just been telling me that your mistress is ill."

"Yes, indeed, more's the pity! our poor dear young lady has been miserable for nearly a year now. It's a shame to see such a sweet angel as she is suffer like that and the master's quite heart-broken over it. But there's nothing the matter with Mrs. Bernauer. How did you come to think that she was sick?"



Muller did not intend to explain that the change in the housekeeper's appearance, a change which had come about between Tuesday morning and Thursday morning, might easily have made any one think that she was ill. He gave as excuse for his question the old man's own words: "Why, I thought that she might be ill also because you said yourself that the housekeeper—what did you say her name was?"

"Bernauer, Mrs. Adele Bernauer. She was a widow when she came to take care of the master. Her husband was a sergeant of artillery."

"Well, I mean," continued Muller, "you said yourself that when the gentleman's parents died, Mrs. Bernauer was a fine active woman, therefore I supposed she was no longer so."

Franz thought the matter over for a while. "I don't know just why I put it that way. Indeed she's still as active as ever and always fresh and well. It's true that for the last two or three days she's been very nervous and since yesterday it is as if she was a changed woman. She must be ill, I don't know how to explain it otherwise."

"What seems to be the matter with her?" asked Muller and then to explain his interest in the housekeeper's health, he fabricated a story: "I studied medicine at one time and although I didn't finish my course or get a diploma, I've always had a great interest in such things, and every now and then I'll take a case, particularly nervous diseases. That was my specialty." Muller took up his glass and turned away from the window, for he felt a slow flush rising to his cheeks. It was another of Muller's peculiarities that he always felt an inward embarrassment at the lies he was obliged to tell in his profession.

The butler did not seem to have noticed it however, and appeared eager to tell of what concerned him in

the housekeeper's appearance and demeanour. "Why, yesterday at dinner time was the first that we began to notice anything wrong with Mrs. Bernauer. The rest of us, that is, Lizzie the upstairs girl, the cook and myself. She began to eat her dinner with a good appetite, then suddenly, when we got as far as the pudding, she let her fork fall and turned deathly white. She got up without saying a word and left the room. Lizzie ran after her to ask if anything was the matter, but she said no, it was nothing of importance. After dinner, she went right out, saying she was doing some errands. She brought in a lot of newspapers, which was quite unusual, for she sometimes does not look at a newspaper once a week even. I wouldn't have noticed it but Lizzie's the kind that sees and hears everything and she told us about it." Franz stopped to take a drink, and Muller said indifferently, "I suppose Mrs. Bernauer was interested in the murder case. The whole neighbourhood seems to be aroused about it."

"No, I don't think that was it," answered the old servant, "because then she would have sent for a paper this morning too."

"And she didn't do that?"

"No, unless she might have gone out for it herself. There's a news stand right next door here. But I don't think she did because I would have seen the paper around the house then."

"And is that all that's the matter with her?" asked Muller in a tone of disappointment. "Why, I thought you'd have something really interesting to tell me."

"Oh, no, that isn't all, sir," exclaimed the old man eagerly.

Muller leaned forward, really interested now, while Franz continued: "She was uneasy all the afternoon yesterday. She walked up and down stairs and

through the halls—I remember Lizzie making some joke about it—and then in the evening to our surprise she suddenly began a great rummaging in the first story.”

“Is that where she lives?”

“Oh, no; her room is in the wing out towards the garden. The rooms on the first floor all belong to the master and mistress. This morning we found out that Mrs. Bernauer’s cleaning up of the evening before had been done because she remembered that the master wanted to take some papers with him but couldn’t find them and had asked her to look for them and send them right on.”

“Well, I shouldn’t call that a sign of any particular nervousness, but rather an evidence of Mrs. Bernauer’s devotion to her duty.”

“Oh, yes, sir—but it certainly is queer that she should go into the garden at four o’clock this morning and appear to be looking for something along the paths and under the bushes. Even if a few of the papers blew out of the window, or blew away from the summer house, where the master writes sometimes, they couldn’t have scattered all over the garden like that.”

Muller didn’t follow up this subject any longer. There might come a time when he would be interested in finding out the reason for the housekeeper’s search in the garden, but just at present he wanted something else. He remembered some remark of the old man’s about the “poor little dog,” and on this he built his plan.

“Oh, well,” he said carelessly, “almost everybody is nervous and impatient now-a-days. I suppose Mrs. Bernauer felt uneasy because she couldn’t find the paper right away. There’s nothing particularly interesting or noticeable about that. Anyway, I’ve been occupying myself much more these last years

with sick animals rather than with sick people. I've had some very successful cures there."

"No, really, have you? Then you could do us a great favour," exclaimed Franz in apparent eagerness. Muller's heart rejoiced. He had apparently hit it right this time. He knew that in a house like that "a poor dog" could only mean a "sick dog." But his voice was quite calm as he asked: "How can I do you a favour?"

"Why, you see, sir, we've got a little terrier," explained the old man, who had quite forgotten the fact that he had mentioned the dog before. "And there's been something the matter with the poor little chap for several days. He won't eat or drink, he bites at the grass and rolls around on his stomach and cries—it's a pity to see him. If you're fond of animals and know how to take care of them, you may be able to help us there."

"You want me to look at the little dog? Why, yes, I suppose I can."

"We'll appreciate it," said the old man with an embarrassed smile. But Muller shook his head and continued: "No, never mind the payment, I wouldn't take any money for it. But I'll tell you what you can do for me. I'm very fond of flowers. If you think you can take the responsibility of letting me walk around in the garden for a little while, and pick a rose or two, I will be greatly pleased."

"Why, of course you may," said Franz. "Take any of the roses you see there that please you. They're nearly over for the season now and it's better they should be picked rather than left to fade on the bush. We don't use so many flowers in the house now when the family are not there."

"All right, then, it's a bargain," laughed Muller, signalling to the landlord. "Are you going already?" asked the old servant.

"Yes, I must be going if I am to spend any time with the little dog."

"I suppose I ought to be at home myself," said Franz. "Something's the matter with the electric wiring in our place. The bell in the master's room keeps ringing. I wrote to Siemens & Halske to send us a man out to fix it. He's likely to come any minute now." The two men rose, paid their checks, and went out together. Outside the café Muller hesitated a moment. "You go on ahead," he said to Franz. "I want to go in here and get a cigar."

While buying his cigar and lighting it, he asked for several newspapers, choosing those which his quick eye had told him were no longer among the piles on the counter. "I'm very sorry, sir," said the clerk; "we have only a few of those papers, just two or three more than we need for our regular customers, and this morning they are all sold. The housekeeper from the Thorne mansion took the very last ones."

This was exactly what Muller wanted to know. He left the store and caught up with the old butler as the latter was opening the handsome iron gate that led from the Thorne property out onto the street. "Well, where's our little patient?" asked the detective as he walked through the courtyard with Franz.

"You'll see him in a minute," answered the old servant. He led the way through a light roomy corridor furnished with handsome old pieces in empire style, and opened a door at its further end.

"This is my room."

It was a large light room with two windows opening on the garden. Muller was not at all pleased that the journey through the hall had been such a short one. However he was in the house, that was something, and he could afford to trust to chance for the rest. Meanwhile he would look at the dog. The little terrier lay in a corner by the stove and it did not

take Muller more than two or three minutes to discover that there was nothing the matter with the small patient but a simple case of over-eating. But he put on a very wise expression as he handled the little dog and looking up, asked if he could get some chamomile tea.

"I'll go for it, I think there's some in the house. Do you want it made fresh?" said Franz.

"Yes, that will be better, about a cupful will do," was Muller's answer. He knew that this harmless remedy would be likely to do the dog good and at the present moment he wanted to be left alone in the room. 'As soon as Franz had gone, the detective hastened to the window, placing himself behind the curtain so that he could not be seen from outside. He himself could see first a wide courtyard lying between the two wings of the house, then beyond it the garden, an immense square plot of ground beautifully cultivated. The left wing of the house was about six windows longer than the other, and from the first story of it it would be quite easy to look out over the vacant lot where the old shed stood which had served as a night's lodging for Johann Knoll.

There was not the slightest doubt in Muller's mind that this part of the tramp's story was true, for by a natural process of elimination he knew there was nothing to be gained by inventing any such tale. Besides which the detective himself had been to look at the shed. His well-known pedantic thoroughness would not permit him to take any one's word for anything that he might find out for himself. In his investigations on Tuesday morning he had already seen the half-ruined shed, now he knew that it contained a broken bench.

Thus far, therefore, Knoll's story was proved to be true—but there was something that didn't quite

hitch in another way. The tramp had said that he had seen first a woman and then a man come from the main house and go in the direction of the smaller house which he took to be the gardener's dwelling. This Muller discovered now was quite impossible. A tall hedge, fully seven or eight feet high and very thick, stretched from the courtyard far down into the garden past the gardener's little house. There was a broad path on the right and the left of this green wall. From his position in the shed, Knoll could have seen people passing only when they were on the *right* side of the hedge. But to reach the gardener's house from the main dwelling, the shortest way would be on the left side of the hedge. This much Muller saw, then he heard the butler's steps along the hall and he went back to the corner where the dog lay.

Franz was not alone. There was some one else with him, the housekeeper, Mrs. Bernauer. Just as they opened the door, Muller heard her say: "If the gentleman is a veterinary, then we'd better ask him about the parrot——"

The sentence was never finished. Muller never found out what was the matter with the parrot, for as he looked up with a polite smile of interest, he looked into a pale face, into a pair of eyes that opened wide in terror, and heard trembling lips frame the words: "There he is again!"

A moment later Mrs. Bernauer would have been glad to have recalled her exclamation, but it was too late.

Muller bowed before her and asked: "'There he is again,' you said; have you ever seen me before?"

The woman looked at him as if hypnotised and answered almost in a whisper: "I saw you Tuesday morning for the first time, Tuesday morning when the family were going away. Then I saw you pass

through our street twice again that same day. This morning you went past the garden gate and now I find you here. What—what is it you want of us?"

"I will tell you what I want, Mrs. Bernauer, but first I want to speak to you alone. Mr. Franz doesn't mind leaving us for a while, does he?"

"But why?" said the old man hesitatingly. He didn't understand at all what was going on and he would much rather have remained.

"Because I came here for the special purpose of speaking to Mrs. Bernauer," replied Muller calmly.

"Then you didn't come on account of the dog?"

"No, I didn't come on account of the dog."

"Then you—you lied to me?"

"Partly."

"And you're no veterinary?"

"No—I can help your dog, but I am not a veterinary and never have been."

"What are you then?"

"I will tell Mrs. Bernauer who and what I am when you are outside—outside in the courtyard there. You can walk about in the garden if you want to, or else go and get some simple purgative for this dog. That is all he needs; he has been over-fed."

Franz was quite bewildered. These new developments promised to be interesting and he was torn between his desire to know more, and his doubts as to the propriety of leaving the housekeeper with this queer stranger. He hesitated until the woman herself motioned to him to go. He went out into the hall, then into the courtyard, watched by the two in the room who stood silently in the window until they saw the butler pass down into the garden. Then they looked at each other.

"You belong to the police?" asked Adele Bernauer finally with a deep sigh.

"That was a good guess," replied Muller with an



ironic smile, adding: "All who have any reason to fear us are very quick in recognising us."

"What do you mean by that?" she exclaimed with a start. "What are you thinking of?"

"I am thinking about the same thing that you are thinking of—that I have proved you are thinking of—the same thing that drove you out into the street yesterday and this morning to buy the papers. These papers print news which is interesting many people just now, and *some people* a great deal. I am thinking of the same thing that was evidently in your thoughts as you peered out of the garden gate this morning, although you would not come out into the street. I know that you do not read even one newspaper regularly. I know also that yesterday and today you bought a great many papers, apparently to get every possible detail about a certain subject. Do you deny this?"

She did not deny it, she did not answer at all. She sank down on a chair, her wide staring eyes looking straight ahead of her, and trembling so that the old chair cracked underneath her weight. But this condition did not last long. The woman had herself well under control. Muller's coming, or something else, perhaps, may have overwhelmed her for a moment, but she soon regained her usual self-possession.

"Still you have not told me what you want here," she began coldly, and as he did not answer she continued: "I have a feeling that you are watching us. I had this feeling when I saw you the first time and noticed then—pardon my frankness—that you stared at us sharply while we were saying good bye to our master and mistress. Then I saw you pass twice again through the street and look up at our windows. This morning I find you at our garden gate and now—you will pardon me if I tell the

exact truth—now you have wormed yourself in here under false pretenses because you have no right whatever to force an entrance into this house. And I ask you again, what do you want here?”

Muller was embarrassed. That did not happen very often. Also it did not happen very often that he was in the wrong as he was now. The woman was absolutely right. He *had* wormed himself into the house under false pretenses to follow up the new clue which almost unconsciously as yet was leading him on with a stronger and stronger attraction. He could not have explained it and he certainly was not ready to say anything about it at police headquarters, even at the risk of being obliged to continue to enter this mysterious house under false pretenses and to be told that he was doing so. Of course this sort of thing was necessary in his business, it was the only way in which he could follow up the criminals.

But there was something in this woman's words that cut into a sensitive spot and drove the blood to his cheeks. There was something in the bearing and manner of this one-time nurse that impressed him, although he was not a man to be lightly impressed. He had a feeling that he had made a fool of himself and it bothered him. For a moment he did not know what he should say to this woman who stood before him with so much quiet energy in her bearing. But the something in his brain, the something that made him what he was, whispered to him that he had done right, and that he must follow up the trail he had found. That gave him back his usual calm.

He took up his hat, and standing before the pale-faced woman, looking her firmly in the eyes, he said: “It is true that I have no right as yet to force my way into your house, therefore I have been obliged to enter it as best I could. I have done this often in my work, but I do it for the safety of society. And

those who reproach me for doing it are generally those whom I have been obliged to persecute in the name of the law. Mrs. Bernauer, I will confess that there are moments in which I feel ashamed that I have chosen this profession that compels me to hunt down human beings. But I do not believe that this is one of those moments. You have read this morning's papers; you must know, therefore, that a man has been arrested and accused of the murder which interests you so much; you must be able to realise the terror and anxiety which are now filling this man's heart. For to-day's papers—I have read them myself—expressed the public sentiment that the police may succeed in convicting this man of the crime, that the death may be avenged and justice have her due. Several of these papers, the papers I know you have bought and presumably read, do not doubt that Johann Knoll is the murderer of Leopold Winkler.

"Now there are at least two people who do not believe that Knoll is the murderer. I am one of them, and you, Mrs. Bernauer, you are the other. I am going now and when I come again, as I doubtless *will* come again, I will come with full right to enter this house. I acknowledge frankly that I have no justification in causing your arrest as yet, but you are quite clever enough to know that if I had the faintest justification I would not leave here alone. And one thing more I have to say. You may not know that I have had the most extraordinary luck in my profession, that in more than a hundred cases there have been but two where the criminal I was hunting escaped me. And now, Mrs. Bernauer, I will bid you good day."

Muller stepped towards the window and motioned to Franz, who was walking up and down outside. The old man ran to the door and met the detective in the hall.

"You'd better go in and look after Mrs. Bernauer," said the latter, "I can find my way out alone."

Franz looked after him, shaking his head in bewilderment and then entered his own room. "Merciful God!" he exclaimed, bending down in terror over the housekeeper, who lay on the floor. In his shock and bewilderment he imagined that she too had been murdered, until he realised that it was only a swoon from which she recovered in a moment. He helped her regain her feet and she looked about as if still dazed, stammering: "Has he gone?"

"The strange man? . . . Yes, he went some time ago. But what happened to you? Did he give you something to make you faint? Do you think he was a thief?"

Mrs. Bernauer shook her head and murmured: "Oh, no, quite the contrary." A remark which did not enlighten Franz particularly as to the status of the man who had just left them. There was a note of fear in the housekeeper's voice and she added hastily: "Does any one besides ourselves know that he was here?"

"No. Lizzie and the cook are in the kitchen talking about the murder."

Mrs. Bernauer shivered again and went slowly out of the room and up the stairs.

If Franz believed that the stranger had left the house by the front entrance he was very much mistaken. When Muller found himself alone in the corridor he turned quickly and hurried out into the garden. None of the servants had seen him. Lizzie and the cook were engaged in an earnest conversation in the kitchen and Franz was fully occupied with Mrs. Bernauer. The gardener was away and his wife busy at her wash tubs. No one was aware, therefore, that Muller spent about ten minutes wandering about the garden, and ten minutes were quite sufficient for

him to become so well acquainted with the place that he could have drawn a map of it. He left the garden through the rear gate, the latch of which he was obliged to leave open. The gardener's wife found it that way several hours later and was rather surprised thereat. Muller walked down the street rapidly and caught a passing tramway. His mood was not of the best, for he could not make up his mind whether or no this morning had been a lost one. His mind sorted and rearranged all that he knew or could imagine concerning Mrs. Bernauer. But there was hardly enough of these facts to reassure him that he was not on a false trail, that he had not allowed himself to waste precious hours all because he had seen a woman's haggard face appear for a moment at the little gate in the quiet street.

## CHAPTER VIII

### JOHANN KNOLL REMEMBERS SOMETHING ELSE

MULLER's goal was the prison where Johann Knoll was awaiting his fate. The detective had permission to see the man as often as he wished to. Knoll had been proven a thief, but the accusation of murder against him had not been strengthened by anything but the most superficial circumstantial evidence, therefore it was necessary that Muller should talk with him in the hope of discovering something more definite.

Knoll lay asleep on his cot as the detective and the warder entered the cell. Muller motioned the attendant to leave him alone with the prisoner and he stood beside the cot looking down at the man. The face on the hard pillow was not a very pleasant one to look at. The skin was roughened and swollen and

had that brown-purple tinge which comes from being constantly in the open air, and from habitual drinking. The weather-beaten look may be seen often in the faces of men whose honest work keeps them out of doors; but this man had not earned his colouring honestly, for he was one of the sort who worked only from time to time when it was absolutely necessary and there was no other way of getting a penny. His hands proved this, for although soiled and grimy they had soft, slender fingers which showed no signs of a life of toil. But even a man who has spent forty years in useless idling need not be all bad. There must have been some good left in this man or he could not have lain there so quietly, breathing easily, wrapped in a slumber as undisturbed as that of a child. It did not seem possible that any man could lie there like that with the guilt of murder on his conscience, or even with the knowledge in his soul that he had plundered a corpse.

Muller had never believed the first to be the case, but he had thought it possible that Knoll knew perfectly well that it was a lifeless body he was robbing. He had believed it at least until the moment when he stood looking down at the sleeping tramp. Now, with the deep knowledge of the human heart which was his by instinct and which his profession had increased a thousand-fold, Muller knew that this man before him had no heavy crime upon his conscience—that it was really as he had said—that he had taken the watch and purse from one whom he believed to be intoxicated only. Of course it was not a very commendable deed for which the tramp was now in prison, but it was slight in comparison to the crimes of which he was suspected.

Muller bent lower over the unconscious form and was surprised to see a gentle smile spread over the face before him. It brightened and changed the

coarse rough face and gave it for a moment a look of almost child-like innocence. Somewhere within the coarsened soul there must be a spot of brightness from which such a smile could come.

But the face grew ugly again as Knoll opened his eyes and looked up. He shook off the clouds of slumber as he felt Muller's hand on his shoulder and raised himself to a sitting position, grumbling: "Can't I have any rest? Are they going to question me again? I'm getting tired of this. I've said everything I know anyhow."

"Perhaps not everything. Perhaps you will answer a few of my questions when I tell you that I believe the story you told us yesterday, and that I want to be your friend and help you."

Knoll's little eyes glanced up without embarrassment at the man who spoke to him. They were sharp eyes and had a certain spark of intelligence in them. Muller had noticed that yesterday, and he saw it again now. But he saw also the gleam of distrust in these eyes, a distrust which found expression in Knoll's next words. "You think you can catch me with your good words, but you're makin' a mistake. I've got nothin' new to say. And you needn't think that you can blind me, I know you're one of the police, and I'm not going to say anything at all."

"Just as you like. I was trying to help you, I believe I really could help you. I have just come from Hietzing—but of course if you don't want to talk to me—" Muller shrugged his shoulders and turned toward the door.

But before he reached it Knoll stood at his side. "You really mean to help me?" he gasped.

"I do," said the detective calmly.

"Then swear, on your mother's soul—or is your mother still alive?"

"No, she has been dead some time."

"Well, then, will you swear it?"

"Would you believe an oath like that?"

"Why shouldn't I?"

"With the life you've been leading?"

"My life's no worse than a lot of others. Stealing those things on Monday was the worst thing I've done yet. Will you swear?"

"Is it something so very important you have to tell me?"

"No, I ain't got nothin' at all new to tell you. But I'd just like to know—in this black hole I've got into—I'd just like to know that there's one human being who means well with me—I'd like to know that there's one man in the world who don't think I'm quite good-for-nothin'."

The tramp covered his face with his hands and gave a heart-rending sob. Deep pity moved the detective's breast. He led Knoll back to his cot, and put both hands on his shoulders, saying gravely: "I believe that this theft was the worst thing you have done. By my mother's salvation, Knoll, I believe your words and I will try to help you."

Knoll raised his head, looking up at Muller with a glance of unspeakable gratitude. With trembling lips he kissed the hand which a moment before had pressed kindly on his shoulder, clinging fast to it as if he could not bear to let it go. Muller was almost embarrassed. "Oh, come now, Knoll, don't be foolish. Pull yourself together and answer my questions carefully, for I am asking you these questions more for your own sake than for anything else."

The tramp nodded and wiped the tears from his face. He looked almost happy again, and there was a softness in his eyes that showed there was something in the man which might be saved and which was worth saving.

Muller sat beside him on the cot and began:



"There was one mistake in your story yesterday. I want you to think it over carefully. You said that you saw first a woman and then a man going through the neighbouring garden. I believe that one or both of these people is the criminal for whom we are looking. Therefore, I want you to try and remember everything that you can connect with them, every slightest detail. Anything that you can tell us may be of the greatest importance. Therefore, think very carefully."

Knoll sat still a few moments, evidently trying hard to put his hazy recollections into useful form and shape. But it was also evident that orderly thinking was an unusual work for him, and he found it almost too difficult. "I guess you better ask me questions, maybe that'll go," he said after a pause.

Then Muller began to question. With his usual thoroughness he began at the very beginning: "When was it that you climbed the fence to get into the shed?"

"It just struck nine o'clock when I put my foot on the lowest bar."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Quite sure. I counted every stroke. You see, I wanted to know how long the night was going to be, seein' I'd have to sleep in that shed. I was in the garden just exactly an hour. I came out of the shed as it struck ten and it wasn't but a few minutes before I was in the street again."

"And when was it that you saw the woman in the garden next door?"

"H'm, I don't just know when that was. I'd been in on the bench quite a while."

"And the man? When did you see the man?"

"He came past a few minutes after the woman had gone towards the little house in the garden."

"Ah! there you see, that's where you made your

mistake. It is more than likely that these two did not go to the little house, but that they went somewhere else. Did they walk slowly and quietly?"

"Not a bit of it. They ran almost . . . Went past as quick as a bat in the night."

"Then they both appeared to be in a hurry?"

"Yes indeed they did."

"Ah, ha, you see! Now when any one's in a hurry he doesn't go the longest way round, as a rule. And it would have been the longest way round for these two people to go from the big house to the gardener's cottage—for the little house you saw *was* the gardener's cottage. There is a tall thick hedge that starts from the main building and goes right down through the garden, quite a distance past the gardener's cottage. The vegetable garden is on the left side of this hedge and in the middle of the vegetable garden is the gardener's cottage. But you could have seen the man and the woman only because they passed down the *right* side of the hedge, and this would have given them a detour of fifty paces or more to reach the gardener's house. Now do you think that two people who were very much in a hurry would have gone down the right side of the hedge, to reach a place which they could have gotten to much quicker on the left side?"

"No, that would have been a fool thing to do."

"And you are quite sure that these people were in a hurry?"

"That's dead sure. I scarcely saw them before they'd gone again."

"And you didn't see them come back?"

"No, at least I didn't pay any further attention to them. When I thought it wouldn't be any good to look about in there I turned around and dozed off."

"And it was during this dozing that you thought you heard the shot?"

"Yes, sir, that's right."

"And you didn't notice anything else? You didn't hear anything else."

"No, nothin' at all, there was so much noise anyway. There was a high wind that night and the trees were rattling and creaking."

"And you didn't see anything else, anything that attracted your attention?"

"No, nothing——" Knoll did not finish his sentence, but began another instead. He had suddenly remembered something which had seemed to him of no importance before. "There was a light that went out suddenly."

"Where?"

"In the side of the house that I could see from my place. There was a lamp in the last window of the second story, a lamp with a red shade. That lamp went out all at once."

"Was the window open?"

"Yes."

"There was a strong wind that night, might not the wind have blown the lamp out?"

"No, that wasn't it," said Knoll, rising hastily.

"Well, how was it?" asked Muller calmly.

"A hand put out the lamp."

"Whose hand?"

"I couldn't see that. The light was so low on account of the shade that I couldn't see the person who stood there."

"And you don't know whether it was a man or a woman?"

"No, I just saw a hand, more like a shadow it was."

"Well, it doesn't matter much anyway. It was after nine o'clock and many people go to bed about that time," said Muller, who did not see much value in this incident.

But Knoll shook his head. "The person who put out that light didn't go to bed, at least not right away," he said eagerly. "I looked over after a while to the place where the red light was and I saw something else."

"Well, what was it you saw?"

"The window had been closed."

"Who closed it? Didn't you see the person that time? The moonlight lay full on the house."

"Yes, when there weren't any clouds. But there was a heavy cloud over the moon just then and when it came out again the window was shut and there was a white curtain drawn in front of it."

"How could you see that?"

"I could see it when the lamp was lit again."

"Then the lamp was lit again?"

"Yes, I could see the red light behind the curtain."

"And what happened then?"

"Nothing more then, except that the man went through the garden."

Muller rose now and took up his hat. He was evidently excited and Knoll looked at him uneasily. "You're goin' already?" he asked.

"Yes, I have a great deal to do to-day," replied the detective and nodded to the prisoner as he knocked on the door. "I am glad you remembered that," he added, "it will be of use to us, I think."

The warder opened the door, let Muller out, and the heavy iron portal clanged again between Knoll and freedom.

Muller was quite satisfied with the result of his visit to the accused. He hurried to the nearest cab stand and entered one of the carriages waiting there. He gave the driver Mrs. Klingmayer's address. It was about two o'clock in the afternoon now and Muller had had nothing to eat yet. But he was quite

unaware of the fact as his mind was so busy that no mere physical sensation could divert his attention for a moment. Muller never seemed to need sleep or food when he was on the trail, particularly not in the fascinating first stages of the case when it was his imagination alone, catching at trifles unnoticed by others, combining them in masterly fashion to an ordered whole, that first led the seekers to the truth.

Now he went over once more all the little apparently trivial incidents that had caused him first to watch the Thorne household and then had drawn his attention, and his suspicion, to Adele Bernauer. It was the broken willow twig that had first drawn his attention to the old garden next the Thorne property. This twig, this garden, and perhaps some one who could reach his home again, unseen and unendangered through this garden—might not this have something to do with the murder?

The breaking of the twig was already explained. It was Johann Knoll who had stepped on it. But he had not climbed the wall at all, had only crept along it looking for a night's shelter. And there was no connection between Knoll and the people who lived in the Thorne house. Muller had not the slightest doubt that the tramp had told the entire truth that day and the day preceding.

Then the detective's mind went back to the happenings of Tuesday morning. The little twig had first drawn his attention to the Thorne estate and the people who lived there. He had seen the departure of the young couple and had passed the house again that afternoon and the following day, drawn to it as if by a magnet. He had not been able then to explain what it was that attracted him; there had been nothing definite in his mind as he strolled past the old mansion. But his repeated appearance had been noticed by some one—by one person only—the house-

keeper. Why should she have noticed it? Had she any reason for believing that she might be watched? People with an uneasy conscience are very apt to connect even perfectly natural trivial circumstances with their own doings. Adele Bernauer had evidently connected Muller's repeated passing with something that concerned herself even before the detective had thought of her at all.

Muller had not noticed her until he had seen her peculiar conduct that very morning. When he heard Franz's words and saw how disturbed the woman was, he asked himself: "Why did this woman want to be shown the spot of the murder? Didn't she know that place, living so near it, as well as any of the many who stood there staring in morbid curiosity? Did she ask to have it shown her that the others might believe she had nothing whatever to do with the occurrences that had happened there? Or was she drawn thither by that queer attraction that brings the criminal back to the scene of his crime?"

The sudden vision of Mrs. Bernauer's head at the garden gate, and its equally sudden disappearance had attracted Muller's attention and his thoughts to the woman. What he had been able to learn about her had increased his suspicions and her involuntary exclamation when she met him face to face in the house had proved beyond a doubt that there was something on her mind. His open accusation, her demeanour, and finally her swoon, were all links in the chain of evidence that this woman knew something about the murder in the quiet lane.

With this suspicion in his mind, what Muller had learned from Knoll was of great value to him, at all events of great interest. Was it the housekeeper who had put out the light? For now Muller did not doubt for a moment that this sudden extinguishing of the lamp was a signal. He believed that Knoll

had seen clearly and that he had told truly what he had seen. 'A lamp that is blown out by the wind flickers uneasily before going out. A sudden extinguishing of the light means human agency. And the lamp was lit again a few moments afterward and burned on steadily as before. A short time after the lamp had been put out the man had been seen going through the garden. 'And it could not have been much later before the shot was heard. This shot had been fired between the hours of nine and ten, for it was during this hour only that Knoll was in the garden house and heard the shot. But it was not necessary to depend upon the tramp's evidence alone to determine the exact hour of the shot. It must have been before half past nine, or otherwise the janitor of No. 1, who came home at that hour and lay awake so long, would undoubtedly have heard a shot fired so near his domicile, in spite of the noise occasioned by the high wind. There would have been sufficient time for Mrs. Bernauer to have reached the place of the murder between the putting out of the lamp and the firing of the shot. But perhaps she may have rested quietly in her room; she may have been only the inciter or the accomplice of the deed. But at all events, she knew something about it, she was in some way connected with it.

Muller drew a deep breath. He felt much easier now that he had arranged his thoughts and marshalled in orderly array all the facts he had already gathered. There was nothing to do now but to follow up a given path step by step and he could no longer reproach himself that he might have cast suspicion on an innocent soul. No, his bearing towards Mrs. Bernauer had not been sheer brutality. His instinct, which had led him so unerringly so many times, had again shown him the right way when he had thrust the accusation in her face.

Now that his mind was easier he realised that he was very hungry. He drove to a restaurant and ordered a hasty meal.

"Beer, sir?" asked the waiter for the third time.

"No," answered Muller, also for the third time.

"Then you'll take wine, sir?" asked the insistent Ganymede.

"Oh, go to the devil! When I want anything I'll ask for it," growled the detective, this time effectively scaring the waiter. It did not often happen that a customer refused drinks, but then there were not many customers who needed as clear a head as Muller knew he would have to have to-day. Always a light drinker, it was one of his rules never to touch a drop of liquor during this first stage of the mental working out of any new problem which presented itself. But soft-hearted as he was, he repented of his irritation a moment later and soothed the waiter's wounded feelings by a rich tip. The boy ran out to open the cab door for his strange customer and looked after him, wondering whether the man was a cranky millionaire or merely a poet. For Joseph Muller, by name and by reputation one of the best known men in Vienna, was by sight unknown to all except the few with whom he had to do on the police force. His appearance, in every way inconspicuous, and the fact that he never sought acquaintance with any one, was indeed of the greatest possible assistance to him in his work. Many of those who saw him several times in a day would pass him or look him full in the face without recognising him. It was only, as in the case of Mrs. Bernauer, the guilty conscience that remembered face and figure of this quiet-looking man who was one of the most-feared servants of the law in Austria.



## CHAPTER IX

## THE ELECTRICIAN

WHEN Muller reached the house where Mrs. Klingmayer lived he ordered the cabman to wait and hurried up to the widow's little apartment. He had the key to Leopold Winkler's room in his own pocket, for Mrs. Klingmayer had given this key to Commissioner von Riedau at the latter's request and the commissioner had given it to Muller. The detective told the good woman not to bother about him as he wanted to make an examination of the place alone. Left to himself in the little room, Muller made a thorough search of it, opening the cupboard, the bureau drawers, every possible receptacle where any article could be kept or hidden. What he wanted to find was some letter, some bit of paper, some memoranda perhaps, anything that would show any connection existing between the murdered man and Mrs. Bernauer, who lived so near the place where this man had died and who was so greatly interested in his murder.

The detective's search was not quite in vain, although he could not tell yet whether what he had found would be of any value. Leopold Winkler had had very little correspondence, or else he had had no reason to keep the letters he received. Muller found only about a half dozen letters in all. Three of them were from women of the half-world, giving dates for meetings. Another was written by a man and signed "Theo." This "Theo" appeared to be the same sort of a cheap rounder that Winkler was. And he seemed to have sunk one grade deeper than the dead man, in spite of the latter's bad reputation. For this

other addressed Winkler as his "Dear Friend" and pleaded with him for "greater discretion," alluding evidently to something which made this discretion necessary.

"I wonder what rascality it was that made these two friends?" murmured Muller, putting "Theo's" letter with the three he had already read. But before he slipped it in his pocket he glanced at the postmark. The letters of the three women had all been posted from different quarters of the city some months ago. Theo's letter was postmarked "Marburg," and dated on the 1st of September of the present year.

Then Muller looked at the postmark of the two remaining letters which he had not yet read, and whistled softly to himself. Both these letters were posted from a certain station in Hietzing, the station which was nearest his own lodgings and also nearest the Thorne house. He looked at the postmark more sharply. They both bore the dates of the present year, one of them being stamped "March 17th," the other "September 24th." This last letter interested the detective most.

Muller was not of a nervous disposition, but his hand trembled slightly as he took the letter from its envelope. It was clear that this letter had been torn open hastily, for the edges of the opening were jagged and uneven.

When the detective had read the letter—it contained but a few lines and bore neither address nor signature—he glanced over it once more as if to memorise the words. They were as follows: "Do not come again. In a day or two I will be able to do what I have to do. I will send you later news to your office. Impatience will not help you."

These words were written hastily on a piece of paper that looked as if it had been torn from a pad. In spite of the haste the writer had been at some pains

to disguise the handwriting. But it was a clumsy disguise, done by one not accustomed to such tricks, and it was evidently done by a woman. All she had known how to do to disguise her writing had been to twist and turn the paper while writing, so that every letter had a different position. The letters were also made unusually long. This peculiarity of the writing was seen on both letters and both envelopes. The earlier letter was still shorter and seemed to have been written with the same haste, and with the same disgust, or perhaps even hatred, for the man to whom it was written.

"Come to-morrow, but not before eight o'clock. He has gone away. God forgive him and you." This was the contents of the letter of the 17th of March. That is, the writer had penned the letter this way. But the last two words, "and you," had evidently not come from her heart, for she had annulled them by a heavy stroke of the pen. A stroke that seemed like a knife thrust, so full of rage and hate it was.

"So he was called to a rendezvous in Hietzing, too," murmured Muller, then he added after a few moments: "But this rendezvous had nothing whatever to do with love."

There was nothing else in Winkler's room which could be of any value to Muller in the problem that was now before him. And yet he was very well satisfied with the result of his errand.

He entered his cab again, ordering the driver to take him to Hietzing. Just before he had reached the corner where he had told the man to stop, another cab passed them, a coupé, in which was a solitary woman. Muller had just time enough to recognise this woman as Adele Bernauer, and to see that she looked even more haggard and miserable than she had that morning. She did not look up as the other cab

passed her carriage, therefore she did not see Muller. The detective looked at his watch and saw that it was almost half-past four. The unexpected meeting changed his plans for the afternoon. He had decided that he must enter the Thorne mansion again that very day, for he must find out the meaning of the red-shaded lamp. And now that the housekeeper was away it would be easier for him to get into the house, therefore it must be done at once. His excuse was all ready, for he had been weighing possibilities. He dismissed his cab a block from his own home and entered his house cautiously.

Muller's lodgings consisted of two large rooms, really much too large for a lone man who was at home so little. But Muller had engaged them at first sight, for the apartment possessed one qualification which was absolutely necessary for him. Its situation and the arrangement of its doors made it possible for him to enter and leave his rooms without being seen either by his own landlady or by the other lodgers in the house. The little apartment was on the ground floor, and Muller's own rooms had a separate entrance opening on to the main corridor almost immediately behind the door. Nine times out of ten, he could come and go without being seen by any one in the house. To-day was the first time, however, that Muller had had occasion to try this particular qualification of his new lodgings.

He opened the street door and slipped into his own room without having seen or been seen by any one. Fifteen minutes later he left the apartment again, but left it such a changed man that nobody who had seen him go in would have recognised him. Before he came out, however, he looked about carefully to see whether there was any one in sight. He came out unseen and was just closing the main door behind him, when he met the janitress.

"Were you looking for anybody in the house?" said the woman, glancing sharply at the stranger, who answered in a slightly veiled voice: "No, I made a mistake in the number. The place I am looking for is two houses further down."

He walked down the street and the woman looked after him until she saw him turn into the doorway of the second house. Then she went into her own rooms. The house Muller entered happened to be a corner house with an entrance on the other street, through which the detective passed and went on his way. He was quite satisfied with the security of his disguise, for the woman who knew him well had not recognised him at all. If his own janitress did not know him, the people in the Thorne house would never imagine it was he.

And indeed Muller was entirely changed. In actuality small and thin, with sparse brown hair and smooth shaven face, he was now an inch or two taller and very much stouter. He wore thick curly blond hair, a little pointed blond beard and moustache. His eyes were hidden by heavy-rimmed spectacles.

It was just half-past five when he rang the bell at the entrance gate to the Thorne property. He had spent the intervening time in the café, as he was in no hurry to enter the house. Franz came down the path and opened the door. "What do you want?" he asked.

"I come from Siemens & Halske; I was to ask whether the other man——"

"Has been here already?" interrupted Franz, adding in an irritated tone, "No, he hasn't been here at all."

"Well, I guess he didn't get through at the other place in time. I'll see what the trouble is," said the stranger, whom Franz naturally supposed to be the electrician. He opened the gate and asked the other

to come in, leading him into the house. Under a cloudy sky the day was fading rapidly. Muller knew that it would not occur to the real electrician to begin any work as late as this, and that he was perfectly safe in the examination he wanted to make.

"Well, what's the trouble here? Why did you write to our firm?" asked the supposed electrician.

"The wires must cross somewhere, or there's something wrong with the bells. When the housekeeper touches the button in her room to ring for the cook or the upstairs girl, the bell rings in Mr. Thorne's room. It starts ringing and it keeps up with a deuce of a noise. Fortunately the family are away."

"Well, we'll fix it all right for you. First of all I want to look at the button in the housekeeper's room."

"I'll take you up there," said Franz.

They walked through the wide corridor, then turned into a shorter, darker hall and went up a narrow winding stairway. Franz halted before a door in the second story. It was the last of the three doors in the hall. Muller took off his hat as the door opened and murmured a "good-evening."

"There's no one there; Mrs. Bernauer's out."

"Has she gone away, too?" asked the electrician hastily.

Franz did not notice that there was a slight change in the stranger's voice at this question, and he answered calmly as ever: "Oh, no; she's just driven to town. I think she went to see the doctor who lives quite a distance away. She hasn't been feeling at all well. She took a cab to-day. I told her she ought to, as she wasn't well enough to go by the tram. She ought to be home any moment now."

"Well, I'll hurry up with the job so that I'll be out of the way when the lady comes," said Muller, as Franz led him to the misbehaving bell.

It was in the wall immediately above a large table

which filled the window niche so completely that there was but scant space left for the comfortable armchair that stood in front of it. The window was open and Muller leaned out, looking down at the garden below.

"What a fine old garden!" he exclaimed aloud. To himself he said: "This is the last window in the left wing. It is the window where Johann Knoll saw the red light."

And when he turned back into the room again he found the source of this light right at his hand on the handsome old table at which Mrs. Bernauer evidently spent many of her hours. A row of books stood against the wall, framing the back of the table. Well-worn volumes of the classics among them gave proof that the one-time nurse was a woman of education. A sewing basket and neat piles of house linen, awaiting repairs, covered a large part of the table-top, and beside them stood a gracefully shaped lamp, covered by a shade of soft red silk.

It took Muller but a few seconds to see all this. Then he set about his investigation of the electric button. He unscrewed the plate and examined the wires meeting under it. While doing so he cast another glance at the table and saw a letter lying there, an open letter half out of its envelope. This envelope was of unusual shape, long and narrow, and the paper was heavy and high-glossed.

"Your housekeeper evidently has no secrets from the rest of you," Muller remarked with a laugh, still busy at the wires, "or she wouldn't leave her letters lying about like that."

"Oh, we've all heard what's in that letter," replied Franz. "She read it to us when it came this morning. It's from the Madam. She sent messages to all of us and orders, so Mrs. Bernauer read us the whole letter. There's no secrets in that."

"The button has been pressed in too far and caught

down. That seems to be the main trouble," said Muller, readjusting the little knob. "I'd like a candle here if I may have one."

"I'll get you a light at once," said Franz. But his intentions, however excellent, seemed difficult of fulfilment. It was rapidly growing dark, and the old butler peered about uncertainly. "Stupid," he muttered. "I don't know where she keeps the matches. I can't find them anywhere. I'm not a smoker, so I haven't any in my pocket."

"Nor I," said Muller calmly, letting his hand close protectingly over a new full box of them in his own pocket.

"I'll get you some from my own room," and Franz hurried away, his loose slippers clattering down the stairs. He was no sooner well out of the room than Muller had the letter in his hand and was standing close by the window to catch the fading light. But on the old servant's return the supposed electrician stood calmly awaiting the coming of the light, and the letter was back on the table half hidden by a piece of linen. Franz did not notice that the envelope was missing. And the housekeeper, whose mind was so upset by the events of the day, and whose thoughts were on other more absorbing matters, would hardly be likely to remember whether she had returned this quite unimportant letter to its envelope or not.

Franz brought a lighted candle with him, and Muller, who really did possess a creditable knowledge of electricity, saw that the wires in the room were all in good condition. As he had seen at first, there was really nothing the matter except with the position of the button. But it did not suit his purpose to enlighten Franz on the matter just yet.

"Now I'd better look at the wires in the gentleman's room," he said, when he had returned plate and button to their place.



"Just as you say," replied Franz, taking up his candle and leading the way out into the hall and down the winding stair. They crossed the lower corridor, mounted another staircase and entered a large, handsomely furnished room, half studio, half library. The wall was covered with pictures and sketches, several easels stood piled up in the corner, and a broad table beside them held paint boxes, colour tubes, brushes, all the paraphernalia of the painter, now carefully ordered and covered for a term of idleness. Great bookcases towered to the ceiling, and a huge flat top desk, a costly piece of furniture, was covered with books and papers. It was the room of a man of brains and breeding, a man of talent and ability, possessing, furthermore, the means to indulge his tastes freely. Even now, with its master absent, the handsome apartment bore the impress of his personality. The detective's quick imagination called up the attractive, sympathetic figure of the man he had seen at the gate, as his quick eye took in the details of the room. All the charm of Herbert Thorne's personality, which the keen-sensed Muller had felt so strongly even in that fleeting glimpse of him, came back again here in the room which was his own little kingdom and the expression of his mentality.

"Well, what's the trouble here? Where are the wires?" asked the detective, after the momentary pause which had followed his entrance into the room. Franz led him to a spot on the wall hidden by a marquetry cabinet. "Here's the bell, it rings for several minutes before it stops."

The light of the candle which the butler held fell upon a portrait hanging above the cabinet. It was a sketch in water-colours, the life-sized head of a man who may have been about thirty years old, perhaps, but who had none of the freshness and vigour of youth. The scanty hair, the sunken temples, and the faded

skin, emphasised the look of dissipation given by the lines about the sensual mouth and the shifty eyes.

"Well, say, can't your master find anything better to paint than a face like that?" Muller asked with a laugh.

"Goodness me! you mustn't say such things!" exclaimed Franz in alarm; "that's the Madam's brother. He's an officer, I'd have you know. It's true, he doesn't look like much there, but that's because he's not in uniform. It makes such a difference."

"Is the lady anything like her brother?" asked the detective indifferently, bending to examine the wiring.

"Oh, dear, no, not a bit; they're as different as day and night. He's only her half-brother anyway. She was the daughter of the Colonel's second wife. Our Madam is the sweetest, gentlest lady you can imagine, an angel of goodness. But the Lieutenant here has always been a care to his family, they say. I guess he's quieted down a bit now, for his father—he's Colonel Leining, retired—made him get exchanged from the city to a small garrison town. There's nothing much to do in Marburg, I dare say—well! you are a merry sort, aren't you?" These last words, spoken in a tone of surprise, were called forth by a sudden sharp whistle from the detective, a whistle which went off into a few merry bars.

A sudden whistle like that from Muller's lips was something that made the Imperial Police Force sit up and take notice, for it meant that things were happening, and that the happenings were likely to become exciting. It was a habit he could control only by the severest effort of the will, an effort which he kept for occasions when it was absolutely necessary. Here, alone with the harmless old man, he was not so much on his guard, and the sudden vibrating of every

nerve at the word "Marburg," found vent in the whistle which surprised old Franz. One young police commissioner with a fancy for metaphor had likened this sudden involuntary whistle of Muller's to the bay of the hound when he strikes the trail; which was about what it was.

"Yes, I am merry sometimes," he said with a laugh. "It's a habit I have. Something occurred to me just then, something I had forgotten. Hope you don't mind."

"Oh, no, there's no one here now, whistle all you like."

But Muller's whistle was not a continuous performance, and he had now completely mastered the excitation of his nerves which had called it forth. He threw another sharp look at the picture of the man who lived in Marburg, and then asked: "And now where is the button?"

"By the window there, beside the desk." Franz led the way with his candle.

"Why, how funny! What are those mirrors there for?" asked the electrician in a tone of surprise, pointing to two small mirrors hanging in the window niche. They were placed at a height and at such a peculiar angle that no one could possibly see his face in them.

"Something the master is experimenting with, I guess. He's always making queer experiments; he knows a lot about scientific things."

Muller shook his head as if in wonderment, and bent to investigate the button which was fastened into the wall beneath the window sill. His quick ear heard a carriage stopping in front of the house, and heard the closing of the front door a moment later. To facilitate his examination of the button, the detective had seated himself in the armchair which stood beside the desk. He half raised himself now to let

the light of the candle fall more clearly on the wiring—then he started up altogether and threw a hasty glance at the mirrors above his head. A ray of light had suddenly flashed down upon him—a ray of *red* light, and it came reflected from the mirrors. Muller bit his lips to keep back the betraying whistle.

“What’s the matter?” asked the butler. “Did you drop anything?”

“Yes, the wooden rim of the button,” replied Muller, telling the truth this time. For he had held the little wooden circlet in his hands at the moment when the red light, reflected down from the mirrors, struck full upon his eyes. He had dropped it in his surprise and excitement. Franz found the little ring in the centre of the room where it had rolled, and the supposed electrician replaced it and rose to his feet, saying: “There, I’ve finished now.”

Franz did not recognise the double meaning in the words. “Yes, it’s all right! I’ve finished here now,” Muller repeated to himself. For now he knew beyond a doubt that the red light *was* a signal—and he knew also for whom this signal was intended. It was a signal for Herbert Thorne!—Herbert Thorne, whom no single thought or suspicion of Muller’s had yet connected with the murder of Leopold Winkler.

The detective was very much surprised and greatly excited. But Franz did not notice it, and indeed a far keener observer than the slow-witted old butler might have failed to see the sudden gleam which shot up in the grey eyes behind the heavy spectacles, might have failed to notice the tightening of the lips beneath the blond moustache, or the tenseness of the slight frame under the assumed embonpoint. Muller’s every nerve was tingling, but he had himself completely in hand.

“What do we owe you?” asked Franz.

"They'll send you a bill from the office. It won't amount to much. I must be getting on now."

Muller hastened out of the door and down the street to the nearest cab stand. There were not very many cab stands in this vicinity, and the detective reasoned that Mrs. Bernauer would naturally have taken her cab from the nearest station. He had heard her return in her carriage, presumably the same in which she had started out.

There was but one cab at the stand. Muller walked to it and laid his hand on the door.

"Oh, Jiminy! must I go out again?" asked the driver hoarsely. "Can't you see the poor beast is all wet from the last ride? We've just come in." He pointed with his whip to the tired-looking animal under his blanket.

"Why, he does look warm. You must have been making a tour out into the country," said the blond gentleman in a friendly tone.

"No, sir, not quite so far as that. I've just taken a woman to the main telegraph office in the city and back again. But she was in a hurry and he's not a young horse, sir."

"Well, never mind, then; I can get another cab across the bridge," replied the stout blond man, turning away and strolling off leisurely in the direction of the bridge. It was now quite dark, and a few steps further on Muller could safely turn and take the road to his own lodging. No one saw him go in, and in a few moments the real Muller, slight, smooth-shaven, sat down at his desk, looking at the papers that lay before him. They were three letters and an empty envelope.

He took up the last, and compared it carefully with the envelope of one of the letters found in Winkler's room—the unsigned letter postmarked Hietzing, September 24th. The two envelopes were exactly

alike. They were of the same size and shape, made of the same cream-tinted, heavy, glossy paper, and the address was written by the same hand. This any keen observer, who need not necessarily be an expert, could see. The same hand which had addressed the envelope to Mrs. Adele Bernauer on the letter which was postmarked "Venice," about thirty-six hours previous—this hand had, in an awkward and childish attempt at disguise, written Winkler's address on the envelope which bore the date of September 24th.

The writer of the harmless letter to Mrs. Bernauer, a letter which chatted of household topics and touched lightly on the beauties of Venice, was Mrs. Thorne. It was Mrs. Thorne, therefore, who, reluctantly and in anger and distaste, had called Leopold Winkler to Hietzing, to his death.

And whose hand had fired the shot that caused his death? The question, at this stage in Muller's meditation, could hardly be called a question any more. It was all too sadly clear to him now. Winkler met his death at the hand of the husband, who, discovering the planned rendezvous, had misunderstood its motive.

For truly this had been no lovers' meeting. It had been a meeting to which the woman was driven by fear and hate; the man by greed of gain. This was clearly proved by the 300 guldens found in the dead man's pocket, money enclosed in a delicate little envelope, sealed hastily, and crumpled as if it had been carried in a hot and trembling hand.

It was already known that Winkler never had any money except at certain irregular intervals, when he appeared to have come into possession of considerable sums. During these days he indulged in extravagant pleasures and spent his money with a recklessness which proved that he had not earned it by honest work.

Leopold Winkler was a blackmailer.

Colonel Leining, retired, the father of two such widely different children, was doubtless a man of stern principles, and an army officer as well, therefore a man with a doubly sensitive code of honour and a social position to maintain; and this man, morbidly sensitive probably, had a daughter who had inherited his sensitiveness and his high ideals of honour, a daughter married to a rich husband. But he had another child, a son without any sense of honour at all, who, although also an officer, failed to live in a manner worthy his position. This son was now in Marburg, where there were no expensive pleasures, no all-night cafés and gambling dens, for a man to lose his time in, his money, and his honour also.

For such must have been the case with Colonel Leining's son before his exile to Marburg. The old butler had hinted at the truth. The portrait drawn by Herbert Thorne, a picture of such technical excellence that it was doubtless a good likeness also, had given an ugly illustration to Franz's remarks. And there was something even more tangible to prove it: "Theo's" letter from Marburg pleading with Winkler for "discretion and silence," not knowing ("let us hope he did not know!" murmured Muller between set teeth) that the man who held him in his power because of some rascality, was being paid for his silence by the Lieutenant's sister.

It is easy to frighten a sensitive woman, so easy to make her believe the worst! And there is little such a tender-hearted woman will not do to save her aging father from pain and sorrow, perhaps even disgrace!

It must have been in this way that Mrs. Thorne came into the power of the scoundrel who paid with his life for his last attempt at blackmail.

When Muller reached this point in his chain of

thought, he closed his eyes and covered his face with his hands, letting two pictures stand out clear before his mental vision.

He saw the little anxious group around the carriage in front of the Thorne mansion. He saw the pale, frail woman leaning back on the cushions, and the husband bending over her in tender care. And then he saw Johann Knoll in his cell, a man with little manhood left in him, a man sunk to the level of the brutes, a man who had already committed one crime against society, and who could never rise to the mental or spiritual standard of even the most mediocre of decent citizens.

If Herbert Thorne were to suffer the just punishment for his deed of doubly blind jealousy, then it was not only his own life, a life full of gracious promise, that would be ruined, but the happiness of his delicate, sweet-faced wife, who was doubtless still in blessed ignorance of what had happened. And still one other would be dragged down by this tragedy; a respected, upright man would bow his white hairs in disgrace. Thorne's father-in-law could not escape the scandal and his own share in the responsibility for it. And to a veteran officer, bred in the exaggerated social ethics of his profession, such a disgrace means ruin, sometimes even voluntary death.

"Oh, dear, if it had only been Knoll who did it," said Muller with a sigh that was almost a groan.

Then he rose slowly and heavily, and slowly and heavily, as if borne down by the weight of great weariness, he reached for his hat and coat and left the house.

Whether he wished it or not, he knew it was his duty to go on to the bitter end on this trail he had followed up all day from the moment that he caught that fleeting glimpse of Mrs. Bernauer's haggard face at the garden gate. He was almost angry with the



woman because she chanced to look out of the gate at just that moment, showing him her face distorted with anxiety. For it was her face that had drawn Muller to the trail, a trail at the end of which misery awaited those for whom this woman had worked for years, those whom she loved and who treated her as one of the family.

Muller knew now that the one-time nurse was in league with her former charge; that Thorne and Adele Bernauer were in each other's confidence; that the man sat waiting for the signal which she was to give him, a signal bringing so much disgrace and sorrow in its train.

If the woman had not spied upon and betrayed her mistress, this terrible event, which now weighed upon her own soul, would not have happened.

"A faithful servant, indeed," said Muller, with a harsh laugh.

Then maturer consideration came and forced him to acknowledge that it was indeed devotion that had swayed Adele Bernauer, devotion to her master more than to her mistress. This was hardly to be wondered at. But she had not thought what might come from her revelations, what *had* come of them. For now her pet, the baby who had once lain in her arms, the handsome, gifted man whom she adored with more than the love of many a mother for the child of her own blood, was under the shadow of hideous disgrace and doom, was the just prey of the law for open trial and condemnation as a murderer.

Muller sighed deeply once more and then came one of those moments which he had spoken of to the unhappy woman that very day. He felt like cursing the fatal gift that was his, the gift to see what was hidden from others, this something within him that forced him relentlessly onward until he had uncovered the truth, and brought misery to many.

Muller need not do anything, he need simply do *nothing*. Not a soul besides himself suspected the dwellers in the Thorne mansion of any connection with the murder. If he were silent, nothing could be proven against Knoll after all, except the robbery which he himself had confessed. Then the memory of the terror in the tramp's little reddened eyes came back to the detective's mind.

"A human soul after all, and a soul trembling in the shadow of a great fear. And even he's a better man than the blackmailer who was killed. A miscarriage of justice will often make a criminal of a poor fellow whose worst fault is idleness." Muller's face darkened as the things of the past, shut down in the depths of his own soul, rose up again. "No; that's why I took up this work. Justice must be done—but it's bitter hard sometimes. I could almost wish now that I hadn't seen that face at the gate."

## CHAPTER X

### MULLER RETURNS TO THE THORNE MANSION

It was striking eight as Muller came out of a café in the heart of the city. He had been in there but a few moments, for his purpose was merely to look through the Army lists of the current year. The result of his search proved the correctness of his conclusions.

There was a Lieutenant Theobald Leining in the single infantry regiment stationed at Marburg.

Muller took a cab and drove to the main telegraph office. He asked for the original of the telegram which had been sent that afternoon to the address, "Herbert Thorne, Hotel Danieli, Venice." This closed the circle of the chain.

The detective re-entered his waiting cab and drove back to Hietzing. He told the driver to halt at the corner of the street on which fronted the Thorne mansion and to wait for him there. He himself walked slowly down the quiet street and rang the bell at the iron gate.

"You come to this house again?" asked Franz, starting back in alarm when he saw who it was that had called him to the door.

"Yes, my good friend; I want to get into this house again. But not on false pretenses this time. And before you let me in you can go upstairs and ask Mrs. Bernauer if she will receive me in her own room—in her own room, mind. But make haste; I am in a hurry." The detective's tone was calm and he strolled slowly up and down in front of the gate when he had finished speaking.

The old butler hesitated a moment, then walked into the house. When he returned, rather more quickly, he looked alarmed and his tone was very humble as he asked Muller to follow him.

When the detective entered Mrs. Bernauer's room the housekeeper rose slowly from the large armchair in front of her table. She was very pale and her eyes were full of terror. She made no move to speak, so Muller began the conversation. He put down his hat, brought up a chair and placed it near the window at which the housekeeper had been sitting. Then he sat down and motioned to her to do the same.

"You are a faithful servant, all too faithful," he began. "But you are faithful only to your master. You have no devotion for his wife."

"You are mistaken," replied the woman in a low tone.

"Perhaps, but I do not think so. One does not betray the people to whom one is devoted."

Mrs. Bernauer looked up in surprise. "What—what do you know?" she stammered.

Muller did not answer the question directly, but continued: "Mrs. Thorne had a meeting recently with a strange man. It was not their first meeting, and somehow you discovered it. But before this last meeting occurred you spoke to the lady's husband about it, and it was arranged between you that you should give him a signal which would mean to him, 'Your wife is going to the meeting.' Mrs. Thorne did go to the meeting. This happened on Monday evening at about quarter past nine. Some one, who was in the neighbourhood by chance, saw a woman's figure hurrying through the garden, down to the other street, and a moment after this, the light of this lamp in your window was seen to go out. A hand had turned down the wick—it was your hand.

"This was the signal to Mr. Thorne. The mirrors over his desk reflected in his eyes the light he could not otherwise have seen as he sat by his own window. The signal, therefore, told him that the time had come to act. This same chance watcher, who had seen the woman going through the garden, had seen the lamp go out, and now saw a man's figure hurrying down the path the woman had taken. The man as well as the woman came from this house and went in the direction of the lower end of the garden.

"A little while later a shot was heard, and the next morning Leopold Winkler was found with a bullet in his back. The crime was generally taken to be a murder for the sake of robbery. But you and I, and Mr. Herbert Thorne, know very well that it was not.

"*You* know this since Wednesday noon. Then it was that the idea suddenly came to you, falling like a heavy weight on your soul, the idea that Winkler might not have been killed for the sake of robbery,

but because of the hatred that some one bore him. Then it was that you lost your appetite suddenly, that you drove into the city with the excuse of errands to do, in order to read the papers without being seen by any one who knew you. When you came home you searched everywhere in your master's room: you made an excuse for this search, but what you wanted to find out was whether he had left anything that could betray him. Your fright had already confused your mind. You were searching probably for the weapon from which he had fired the bullet. You did not realise that he would naturally have taken it with him and thrown it somewhere into a ravine or river beside the railway track between here and Venice. How could you think for a moment that he would leave it behind him, here in his room, or dropped in the garden? But this was doubtless due to the confusion owing to your sudden alarm and anxiety—a confusion which prevented you from realising the danger of the two peculiarly hung mirrors in Mr. Thorne's room. These should have been taken away at once. This morning my sudden appearance at the garden gate prevented you from making an examination of the place of the murder. Your swoon, after I had spoken to you in the butler's room, showed me that you were carrying a burden too heavy for your strength. Finally, this afternoon, you drove to the main telegraph office in the city, as you thought that it would be safer to telegraph Mr. Thorne from there. Your telegram was very cleverly written. But you might have spared the last sentence, the request that Mr. Thorne should get the Viennese papers of these last days. Believe me, he has already read these papers. Who could be more interested in what they have to tell than he?"

The housekeeper had sat as if frozen to stone during Muller's long speech. Her face was ashen and

her eyes wild with horror. When the detective ceased speaking, there was dead silence in the room for some time. Finally Muller asked: "Is this what happened?" His voice was cutting and the glance of his eyes keen and sharp.

Mrs. Bernauer trembled. Her head sank on her breast. Muller waited a moment more and then he said quietly: "Then it is true."

"Yes, it is true," came the answer in a low hoarse tone.

Again there was silence for an appreciable interval.

"If you had been faithful to your mistress as well, if you had not spied upon her and betrayed her to her husband, all this might not have happened," continued the detective pitilessly, adding with a bitter smile: "And it was not even a case of sinful love. Your mistress had no such relations with this Winkler as you—I say this to excuse you—seemed to believe."

Adele Bernauer sprang up. "I do not need this excuse," she cried, trembling in excitement. "I do not need any excuse. What I have done I did after due consideration and in the realisation that it was absolutely necessary to do it. *Never* for one moment did I believe that my mistress was untrue to her husband. *Never* for one moment could I believe such an evil thing of her, for I knew her to be an angel of goodness. A woman who is deceiving her husband is not as unhappy as this poor lady has been for months. A woman does not write to a successful lover with so much sorrow, with so many tears. I had long suspected these meetings before I discovered them, but I knew that these meetings had nothing whatever to do with love. Because I knew this, and *only because I knew it*, did I tell my master about them. I wanted him to *protect* his wife, to free her

from the wretch who had obtained some power over her, I knew not how."

"Ah! then that was it?" exclaimed Muller, and his eyes softened as he looked at the sobbing woman who had sunk back into her chair. He laid his hand on her cold fingers and continued gently: "Then you have really done right, you have done only what was your duty. I pity you deeply that you——"

"That I have brought suspicion upon my master by my own foolishness?" she finished the sentence with a pitifully sad smile. "If I could have controlled myself, could have kept calm, nobody would have had a thought or a suspicion that he—my pet, my darling—that it was he who was forced, through some terrible circumstance of which I do not know, to free his wife, in this manner, from the wretch who persecuted her."

Mrs. Bernauer wrung her hands and gazed with despairing eyes at the man who sat before her, himself deeply moved.

Again there was a long silence. Muller could not find a word to comfort the weeping woman. There was no longer anger in his heart, nothing but the deepest pity. He took out his handkerchief and wiped away the drops that were dimming his own eyes.

"You know that I will have to go to Venice?" he asked.

Mrs. Bernauer sprang up. "Officially?" she gasped, pale to her lips.

He nodded. "Yes, officially of course. I must make a report at once to headquarters about what I have learned. You can imagine yourself what the next steps will be."

Her deep sigh showed him that she knew as well as he. In the same second, however, a thought shot through her brain, changing her whole being. Her

pale face glowed, her dulled eyes shot fire, and the fingers with which she held Muller's hand tightly clasped, were suddenly feverishly hot.

"And you—you are still the only person who knows the truth?" she gasped in his ear.

The detective nodded. "And you thought you might silence me?" he asked calmly. "That will not be easy—for you can imagine that I did not come unarmed."

Adele Bernauer smiled sadly. "I would take even *this* way to save Herbert Thorne from disgrace, if I thought that it could be successful, and if I had not thought of a milder way to silence a man who cannot be a millionaire. I have served in this house for thirty-two years, I have been treated with such generosity that I have been able to save almost every cent of my wages for my old age. With the interest that has rolled up, my little fortune must amount to nearly eight thousand gulden. I will gladly give it to you, if you will but keep silence, if you will not tell what you have discovered." She spoke gaspingly and sank down on her knees before she had finished.

"And Mr. Thorne also——" she continued hastily, as she saw no sign of interest in Muller's calm face. Then her voice failed her.

The detective looked down kindly on her grey hairs and answered: "No, no, my good woman; that won't do. One cannot conceal one crime by committing another. I myself would naturally not listen to your suggestion for a moment, but I am also convinced that Mr. Thorne, to whom you are so devoted, and who, I acknowledge, pleased me the very first sight I had of him—I am convinced that he would not agree for a moment to any such solution of the problem."

"Then I can only hope that you will not find him



in Venice," replied Mrs. Bernauer, with utter despair in her voice and eyes.

"I am not at all certain that I *will* find him in Venice when I leave here to-morrow morning," said Muller calmly.

"Oh! then you don't *want* to find him! Oh God! how good, how inexpressibly good you are," stammered the woman, seizing at some vague hope in her distraught heart.

"No, you are mistaken again, Mrs. Bernauer. I will find Mr. Thorne wherever he may be. But I may arrive in Venice too late to meet him there. He may already be on his way home."

"On his way home?" cried the housekeeper in terror, staggering where she stood.

Muller led her gently to a chair. "Sit down here and listen to me calmly. This is what I mean. If Mr. Thorne has seen in the papers that a man has been arrested and accused of the murder of Leopold Winkler, then he will take the next train back and give himself up to the authorities. That he makes no such move as long as he thinks there is no suspicion on any one else, no possibility that any one else could suffer the consequences of his deed—is quite comprehensible—it is only natural and human."

Adele Bernauer sighed deeply again and heavy tears ran down her cheeks, in strange contrast to the ghost of a smile that parted her lips and shone in her dimmed eyes.

"You know him better than I do," she murmured almost inaudibly, "you know him better than I do, and I have known him for so long."

A moment later Muller had parted from the housekeeper with a warm, sincere pressure of the hand.

"Lieutenant Theobald Leining was here on a visit to his sister last March, wasn't he?" the detective asked as Franz led him out of the gate.

"Yes, sir; the Lieutenant was here just about that time," answered the old man.

"And he left here on the 16th of March?"

"On the 16th? Why, it may have been—yes, it was the 16th—that is our lady's birthday. He went away that day." Franz bowed a farewell to this stranger who began to appear uncanny in his eyes, and shutting the gate carefully he returned to the house.

"What does the man want anyway?" he murmured to himself, shivering involuntarily. Without knowing why he turned his steps towards Mrs. Bernauer's room. He opened the door hesitatingly as if afraid of what he might see there. He would not have been at all surprised if he had found the housekeeper fainting on the floor as before.

But she was not fainting this time. She was very much alive, for, to Franz's great astonishment, she was busied at the packing of a valise.

"Are you going away too?" asked Franz. Mrs. Bernauer answered in a voice that was dull with weariness: "Yes, Franz, I am going away. Will you please look up the time-tables of the Southern railroad and let me know when the morning express leaves? And please order a cab in time for it. I will depend upon you to look after the house in my absence. You can imagine that it must be something very important that takes me to Venice."

"To Venice? (Why, what are you going to Venice for?"

"Never mind about that, Franz, but help me to pray that I may get there in time."

She almost pushed the old man out of the door with these last words and shut and locked it behind him.

She wanted to be alone with this hideous fear that was clutching at her heart. For it was not to Franz

that she could tell the thoughts that came to her lips now as she sank down, wringing her hands, before a picture of the Madonna: "Oh Holy Virgin, Mother of our Lord, plead for me! let me be with my dear mistress when the terrible time comes and they take her husband away from her, or, if preferring death to disgrace, he ends his life by his own hand!"

## CHAPTER XI

### IN THE POLICE COURT

COMMISSIONER VON RIEDAU sat at his desk late that evening, finishing up some important papers. The quiet of an undisturbed night watch had settled down on the busy police station. An occasional low murmur of whispering voices floated up from the guard-room below, but otherwise the stillness was broken only by the scratching of the commissioner's pen and the rustle of the paper as he turned the leaves. It was a silence so complete that a light step on the stair outside and the gentle turning of the doorknob was heard distinctly and the commissioner looked up with almost a start to see who was coming to his room so late. Joseph Muller stood in the open door, awaiting his chief's official recognition.

"Oh! it's you, Muller. So late? Come in. Anything new?" asked the commissioner. "Have you succeeded in drawing a confession from that stubborn tramp yet? You've been interviewing him, I take it?"

"Yes, I had a long talk with Johann Knoll to-day."

"Well, that ought to help matters along. Has he confessed? What could you get out of him?"

"Nothing, or almost nothing more than he told us here in the station, sir."

"The man's incredibly stubborn," said the commissioner. "If he could only be made to understand that a free confession would benefit him more than any one else! Well, don't look so down-cast about it, Muller. This thing is going to take longer than we thought at first for such a simple affair. But it's only a question of time until the man comes to his senses. You'll get him to talk soon. You always do. And even if you should fail here, this matter is not so very important, when we think of all the other things you have done." Muller, standing front of the desk, shook his head sadly.

"But I haven't failed here, sir. More's the pity, I had almost said."

"What!" The commissioner looked up in surprise. "I thought you just said that you couldn't get anything more out of the accused."

"Knoll has told us all he knows, sir. He did *not* murder Leopold Winkler."

"Hmph!" The commissioner's exclamation had a touch of acidity in it. "Then, if he didn't murder him, who did?"

"Herbert Thorne, painter, living in the Thorne mansion in B. street, Hietzing, now in Venice, Hotel Danieli. I ask for a warrant for his arrest, sir, and orders to start for Venice on the early morning express to-morrow."

"Muller! . . . what the deuce does all this mean?" The commissioner sprang up, his face flushing deeply as he leaned over the desk staring at the sad quiet face of the little man opposite. "What are you talking about? What does all this mean?"

"It means, sir, that we now know who committed the murder in Hietzing. Johann Knoll is innocent of anything more than the theft confessed by himself. He took the purse and watch from the senseless form of the just murdered man. The body was

warm and still supple and the tramp supposed the victim to be merely intoxicated. His story was in every respect true, sir."

The commissioner flushed still deeper. "And who do you say murdered this man?"

"Herbert Thorne, sir."

"But Thorne! I know of him . . . have even a slight personal acquaintance with him . . . Thorne is a rich man, of excellent family. Why should he murder and rob an obscure clerk like this Winkler?"

"He did not rob him sir, Knoll did that."

"Oh, yes. But why should Thorne commit murder on this man who scarcely touched his life at any point. . . . It's incredible! Muller! Muller! are you sure you are not letting your imagination run away with you again? It is a serious thing to make such an accusation against any man, much less against a man in Thorne's position. Are you sure of what you are saying?" The commissioner's excitement rendered him almost inarticulate. The shock of the surprise occasioned by the detective's words produced a feeling of irritation, . . . a phenomenon not unusual in the minds of worthy but pedantic men of affairs when confronted by a startling new thought.

"I am quite sure of what I am saying, sir. I have just heard the confession of one who might be called an accomplice of the murderer."

"It is incredible . . . incredible! An accomplice you say? . . . who is this accomplice? Might it not be some one who has a grudge against Thorne—some one who is trying to purposely mislead you?"

"I am not so easily deceived or misled, sir. Every evidence points to Thorne, and the confession I have just heard was made by a woman who loves him,

who has loved and cared for him from his babyhood. There is not the slightest doubt of it, sir."

Muller moved a step nearer the desk, gazing firmly in the eyes of the excited commissioner. The sadness on the detective's face had given way to a gleam of pride that flushed his sallow cheek and brightened his grey eyes. It was one of those rare moments when Muller allowed himself a feeling of triumph in his own power, in spite of official subordination and years of habit. His slight frame seemed to grow taller and broader as he faced the Chief with an air of quiet determination that made him at once master of the situation. His voice was as low as ever but it took on a keen incisive note that compelled attention, as he continued: "Herbert Thorne is the murderer of Leopold Winkler. Now that he knows an innocent man is under accusation for his deed it is only a question of time before he will come himself to confess. He will doubtless make this confession to me, if I go to Venice to see him, and to bring him back to trial."

The commissioner could doubt no longer. Pedantic though he was, Commissioner von Riedau possessed sufficient insight to know the truth when it was presented to him with such conviction, and also sufficient insight to have recognised the gifts of the man before him. "But why . . . why?" he murmured, sinking back into his chair, and shaking his head in bewilderment.

"Winkler was a miserable scoundrel, sir . . . a blackmailer. Thorne did only what any decent man would have felt like doing in his place. But justice must be done."

Muller's elation vanished and a deep sigh welled up from his heart. The commissioner nodded slowly, and glanced across the desk almost timidly. This case had appeared to be so simple, and suddenly

the hidden depths of a dark mystery had opened before him, depths already sounded by the little man here who had gone so quietly about his work while the official police, represented in this case by Commissioner von Riedau himself, had sat calmly waiting for an innocent man to confess to a crime he had not committed! It was humiliating. The commissioner flushed again and his eyes sank to the floor.

"Tell me what you know, Muller," he said finally.

Muller told the story of his experiences in the Thorne mansion, told of the slight clues which led him to take an interest in the house and its inmates, until finally the truth began to glimmer up out of the depths. The commissioner listened with eager interest. "Then you believed this elaborate yarn told by the tramp?" he interrupted once, at the beginning of the narrative.

"Why, yes, sir, just because it was so elaborate. A man like Knoll would not have had the mind to invent such a story. It must have been true, on the face of it."

The commissioner's eyes sank again, and he did not speak until the detective had reached the end of his story. Then he opened a drawer in his desk and took out a bundle of official blank-forms.

"It is wonderful! Wonderful! Muller, this case will go on record as one of your finest achievements—and we thought it was so simple . . ."

"Oh, indeed, sir, chance favoured me at every turn," replied Muller modestly.

"There is no such thing as chance," said the commissioner. "We might as well be honest with ourselves. Any one might have seen, doubtless did see, all the things you saw, but no one else had the insight to recognise their value, nor the skill to follow them up to such a conclusion. But it's a sad case, a sad case, I never wrote a warrant with a heavier

heart. Thorne is a true-hearted gentleman, while the scoundrel he killed. . . ."

"Yes, sir, I feel that way about it myself. I can confess now that there was one moment when I was ready to—well, just to say nothing. . . ."

"And let us blunder on in our official stupidity and blindness?" interrupted the commissioner, a faint smile breaking the gravity of his face. "We certainly gave you every opportunity."

"But there's an innocent man accused—suffering fear of death—justice must be done. But, sir," Muller took the warrant the commissioner handed across the table to him. "May I not make it as easy as I can for Mr. Thorne—I mean, bring him here with as little publicity as possible? His wife is with him in Venice."

"Poor little woman, it's terrible! Do whatever you think best, Muller. You're a queer mixture. Here you've hounded this man down, followed hot on his trail when not a soul but yourself connected him in any way with the murder. And now you're sorry for him! A soft heart like yours is a dangerous possession for a police detective, Muller. It's no aid to our business."

"No, sir, I know that."

"Well take care it doesn't run away with you this time. Don't let Herbert Thorne escape, however much pity you may feel for him."

"I doubt if he'll want to sir, as long as another is in prison for his crime."

"But he may make his confession and then try to escape the disgrace."

"Yes, sir, I've thought of that. That's why I want to go to Venice myself. And then, there's the poor young wife, he must think of her when the desire comes to end his own life. . . ."

"Yes! Yes! This terrible thing has shaken us



both up more than a little. I feel exhausted. You look tired yourself, Muller. Go home now, and get some rest for your early start. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir."

## CHAPTER XII

### ON THE LIDO

A WONDERFULLY beautiful night lay over the fair old city of Venice when the Northern Express thundered over the long bridge to the railway station. A passenger who was alone in a second-class compartment stood up to collect his few belongings. Suddenly he looked up as he heard a voice, a voice which he had learned to know only very recently, calling to him from the door of the compartment.

"Why! you were in the train too? You have come to Venice?" exclaimed Joseph Muller in astonishment as he saw Mrs. Bernauer standing there before him.

"Yes, I have come to Venice too. I must be with my dear lady—when—when Herbert——" She had begun quite calmly, but she did not finish her sentence, for loud sobs drowned the words.

"You were in the next compartment? Why didn't you come in here with me? It would have made this journey shorter for both of us."

"I had to be alone," said the pale woman and then she added: "I only came to you now to ask you where I must go."

"I think we two had better go to the Hotel Bauer. Let me arrange things for you. Mrs. Thorne must not see you until she has been prepared for your coming. I will arrange that with her husband."

The two took each other's hands. They had won

respect and sympathy for each other, this quiet man who went so relentlessly and yet so pityingly about his duty in the interest of justice—and the devoted woman whose faithfulness had brought about such a tragedy.

The train had now entered the railway station. Muller and Mrs. Bernauer stood a few minutes later on the banks of the Grand Canal and entered one of the many gondolas waiting there. The moon glanced back from the surface of the water broken into ripples under the oars of the gondoliers; it shone with a magic charm on the old palaces that stood knee-deep in the lagoons, and threw heavy shadows over the narrow water-roads on which the little dark boats glided silently forward. In most of the gondolas coming from the station excited voices and exclamations of delight broke the calm of the moonlit evening as the tourists rejoiced in the beauty that is Venice.

But in the gondola in which Muller and Mrs. Bernauer sat there was deep silence, silence broken only by a sobbing sigh that now and then burst from the heart of the haggard woman. There were few travellers entering Venice on one of its world-famous moonlit nights who were so sad at heart as were these two.

And there were few travellers in Venice as heavy-hearted as was the man who next morning took one of the earliest boats out to the Lido.

Muller and Mrs. Bernauer were on the same boat watching him from a hidden corner. The woman's sad eyes gazed yearningly at the haggard face of the tall man who stood looking over the railing of the little steamer. Her own tears came as she saw the gloom in the once shining grey eyes she loved so well.

Muller stood beside Mrs. Bernauer. His eyes too,

keen and quick, followed Herbert Thorne as he stood by the rail or paced restlessly up and down; his face too showed pity and concern. He also saw that Thorne held in his hand a bundle of newspapers which were still enclosed in their mailing wrappers. The papers were pressed in a convulsive grip of the artist's long slender fingers.

Muller knew then that Thorne had not yet learned of the arrest of Johann Knoll. At the very earliest, Thursday's papers, which brought the news, could not reach him before Friday morning. But these newspapers (Muller saw that they were German papers) were still in their wrappings. They were probably Viennese papers for which he had telegraphed and which had just arrived. His anxiety had not allowed him to read them in the presence of his wife. He had sought the solitude of early morning on the Lido, that he might learn, unobserved, what terrors fate had in store for him.

It was doubtless Mrs. Bernauer's telegram which caused his present anxiety, a telegram which had reached him only the night before when he returned with his wife from an excursion to Torcello. It had caused him a sleepless night, for it had brought the realisation that his faithful nurse suspected the truth about the murder in the quiet lane. The telegram had read as follows: "Have drawn money and send it at once. Further journey probably necessary, visitor in house to-day. Connected with occurrence in —Street. Please read Viennese papers. News and orders for me please send to address A. B. General Postoffice."

This telegram told Herbert Thorne the truth. And the papers which arrived this morning were to tell him more—*what* he did not yet know. But his heart was drawn with terrors which threw lines in his face and made him look ten years older than on that Tues-

day morning when the detective saw him setting out on his journey with his wife.

When the boat landed at the Lido, Thorne walked off down the road which led to the ocean side. Muller and Mrs. Bernauer entered the waiting tramway that took them in the same direction. They dismounted in front of the bathing establishment, stepped behind a group of bushes and waited there for Thorne. In about ten minutes they saw his tall figure passing on the other side of the road. He was walking down to the beach, holding the still unopened papers in his hand.

A narrow strip of park runs along parallel to the beach in the direction towards Mala Mocco. Muller and Mrs. Bernauer walked along through this park on the path which was nearest the water. The detective watched the rapidly moving figure ahead of them, while the woman's tear-dimmed eyes veiled everything else to her but the path along which her weary feet hastened. Thorne halted about half way between the bathing establishment and the customs barracks, looked around to see if he were alone and threw himself down on the sand.

He had chosen a good place. To the right and to the left were high sand dunes, before him was the broad surface of the ocean, and at his back was rising ground, bare sand with here and there a scraggly bush or a group of high thistles. Herbert Thorne believed himself to be alone here . . . as far as a man can be alone over whom hangs the shadow of a crime. He groaned aloud and hid his pale face in his hands.

In his own distress he did not hear the deep sigh which, just above him on the edge of the knoll, broke from the breast of a woman who was suffering scarcely less than he; he did not know that two pair of sad eyes looked down upon him. And now

into the eyes of the watching woman there shot a gleam of terror. For Herbert Thorne had taken a revolver from his pocket and laid it quietly beside him. Then he took out a notebook and a pencil and placed them beside the weapon. Then slowly, reluctantly, he opened one of the papers.

A light breeze from the shining sea before him carried off the wrapping. The paper which he opened shook in his trembling hands, as his eyes sought the reports of the murder. He gave a sudden start and a tremor ran through his frame. He had come to the spot which told of the arrest of another man, who was under shadow of punishment for the crime which he himself had committed. When he had read this report through, he turned to the other papers. He was quite calm now, outwardly calm at least.

When he had finished reading the papers he laid them in a heap beside him and reached out for his notebook. As he opened it the two watchers saw that between its first pages there was a sealed and addressed letter. Two other envelopes were contained in the notebook, envelopes which were also addressed although still open. Muller's sharp eyes could read the addresses as Thorne took them up in turn, looking long at each of them. One envelope was addressed in Italian to the Chief of Police of Venice, the other to the Chief of Police in Vienna.

The two watchers leaned forward, scarcely three yards above the man in whom they were interested. Thorne tore out two leaves of his notebook and wrote several lines on each of them. One note he placed in the envelope addressed to the Viennese police and sealed it carefully. Then he put the sealed letter with the second note in the other envelope, the one addressed to the Italian police. He put all the letters

back in his notebook, holding it together with a rubber strap, and replaced it in his pocket.

Then he stretched out his hand toward the revolver. The sand came rattling down upon him, the thistles bent over creakingly and two figures appeared beside him.

"There's time enough for that yet, Mr. Thorne," said the man at whom the painter gazed up in bewilderment. And then this man took the revolver quietly from his hand and hid it in his own pocket.

Thorne pressed his teeth down on his lips until the blood came. He could not speak; he looked first at the stranger who had mastered him so completely, and then, in dazed astonishment, at the woman who had sunk down beside him in the sand, clasping his hand in both of hers.

"Adele! Adele! Why are you here?" he stammered finally.

"I want to be with you—in this hour," she answered, looking at him with eyes of worship. "I want to be with my dear lady—to comfort her—to protect her when—when——"

"When they arrest me?" Thorne finished the sentence himself. Then turning to Muller he continued: "And that is why *you* are here?"

"Yes, Mr. Thorne. I have a warrant for your arrest in my pocket. But I think it will be unnecessary to make use of it in the customary official way through the authorities here. I see that you have written to both police stations—confessing your deed. This will amount to a voluntary giving up of yourself to the authorities, therefore all that is necessary is that I return with you in the same train which takes you to Vienna. But I must ask you for those two letters, for until you yourself give them to the police

authorities in my presence, it is my duty to keep them."

Muller had seldom found his official duty as difficult as it was now. His words came haltingly and great drops stood out on his forehead.

The painter rose from the sand and he too wiped his face, which was drawn in agony.

"Herbert, Herbert!" cried Adele Bernauer suddenly. "Oh, Herbert, you *will* live, you *will*! Promise me, you will not think of suicide, it would kill your wife——"

She lay on her knees before him in the sand. He looked down at her gently and with a gesture which seemed to be a familiar one of days long past, he stroked the face that had grown old and worn in these hours of fear for him.

"Yes, you dear good soul, I will live on, I will take upon myself my punishment for killing a scoundrel. The poor man whom they have arrested in my place must not linger in the fear of death. I am ready, sir."

"My name is Muller—detective Muller."

"Joseph Muller, the famous detective Muller?" asked Thorne with a sad smile. "I have had little to do with the police but by chance I have heard of your fame. I might have known; they tell me you are one from whom the truth can never remain hidden."

"My duty is not always an easy one," said Muller.

"Thank you. Dispose of me as you will. I do not wish any privileges that others would not have, Mr. Muller. Here is my written confession and here am I myself. Shall we go now?" Herbert Thorne handed the detective his notebook with its important contents and then walked slowly back along the road he had come.

Muller walked a little behind him, while Mrs. Bern-

auer was at his side. As in days long past, they walked hand in hand.

With eyes full of pity Muller watched them, and he heard Thorne give his old nurse orders for the care of his wife. She was to take Mrs. Thorne to Graz to her father, then to return herself to Vienna and take care of the house as usual, until his attorney could settle up his affairs and sell the property. For Thorne said that neither he nor his wife would ever want to set foot in the house again. He spoke calmly, he thought of everything—he thought even of the possibility that he might have to pay the death penalty for his deed.

For who could tell how the authorities would judge this murder?

It had indeed been a murder by merest chance only. Thorne told his old nurse all about it. When she had given him the signal he had hurried down into the garden, and walking quietly along the path, he had found his wife at the garden gate in conversation with a man who was a stranger to him. That part of their talk which he overheard told him that the man was a blackmailer, and that he was making money on the fact that he had caught Theobald Leining cheating at cards.

This chance had put the officer into Winkler's power. The clerk knew that he could get nothing from the guilty man himself, so he had turned to the latter's sister, who was rich, and had threatened to bring about a disgraceful scandal if she did not pay for his silence. For more than a year he had been getting money from her by means of these threats. All this was clear from the conversation. The man spoke in tones of impertinence, or sneering obsequiousness, the woman's voice showed contempt and hatred.

Thorne's blood began to boil. His fingers tightened



about the revolver which he had brought with him to be ready for any emergency, and he stepped designedly upon a twig which broke under his feet with a noise. He wanted to frighten his wife and send her back to the house. This was what did occur. But the blackmailer was alarmed as well and fled hastily from the garden when he realised that he was not alone with his victim. Thorne followed the man's disappearing figure, calling him to halt. He did not call loudly for he too wanted to avoid a scandal. His intention was to force the man to follow him into the house, to get his written confession of blackmail—then to finish him off with a large sum once for all and kick him out of the place.

In this manner Herbert Thorne thought to free himself and his wife from the persecutions of the rascal. His heart was filled with hatred towards the man. For since Mrs. Bernauer had told him what she had discovered, he knew that it was because of this wretch that his once so happy wife was losing her strength, her health and her peace of mind.

He followed the fleeing man and called to him several times to halt. Finally Winkler half turned and called out over his shoulder: "You'd better leave me alone! Do you want all Vienna to know that your brother-in-law ought to be in jail?"

These words robbed Thorne of all control. He pressed the trigger under his finger and the bullet struck the man before him, who had turned to continue his flight, full in the back. "And that is how I became a murderer." With these words Herbert Thorne concluded his narrative. He appeared quite calm now. He was really calmer, for the strain of the deed, which was justified in his eyes, was not so great upon his conscience as had been the strain of the secret of it.

In his own eyes he had only killed a beast who chanced to bear the form of a man. But of course in the eyes of the world this was a murder like any other, and the man who had committed it knew that he was under the ban of the law, that it was only a chance that the arm of justice had not yet reached out for him. And now this arm had reached out for him, although it was no longer necessary. For Herbert Thorne was not the man to allow another to suffer in his stead.

As soon as he knew that another had been arrested and was under suspicion of the murder, he knew that there was nothing more for him but open confession. But he wished to avoid a scandal even now. If he died by his own hand, then the first cause of all this trouble, his brother-in-law's rascality, could still be hidden.

But now his care was all in vain and Herbert Thorne knew that he must submit to the inevitable. Side by side with his old friend he sat on the deck of the boat that took them back to the Riva dei Schiavoni. Muller sat at some distance from them. The pale sad-faced woman, and the pale sad-faced man had much to say to each other that a stranger might not hear.

When the little boat reached the landing stage, there were but a few steps more to the door of the Hotel Danieli. From a balcony on the first floor a young woman stood looking down onto the canal. She too was pale and her eyes were heavy with anxiety. She had been pale and anxious even then, the day when she left the beautiful old house in the quiet street, to start on this *pleasure* trip to Venice.

It had been no pleasure trip to her. She had seen the change in her husband, a change that struck deep into his very being and altered him in everything except in his love and tender care for her.

"Oh, why is it? what is the matter?" she asked herself a thousand times a day. Could it be possible that he had discovered the secret which tortured her, the only secret she had ever had from him, the secret she had longed to confess to him a hundred times but had lacked courage to do it.

For she had sinned deeply against her husband, she knew. Her fear and her confusion had driven her deeper and deeper into the waters of deceit until it was impossible for her to find the words that would have brought help and comfort from the man whom she loved more than anything else in the world. In the very earliest stages of Winkler's persecution she had lost her head completely and instead of confessing to her husband and asking for his aid and protection, she had pawned the rich jewels which had been his wedding present to get the money demanded by the blackmailer. In her ignorance she had thought that this one sum would satisfy him.

But he came again and again, demanding money which she saved from her pin money, from her household allowance, thus taking what she had intended to use to redeem her jewels. The pledge was lost, and her jewels gone forever. From now on, Mrs. Thorne lived in a terror which sapped her strength and drank her life blood drop by drop. Any hour might bring discovery, a discovery which she feared would shake her husband's love for her. The poor weak little woman grew pale and ill. She wrote finally to her step-brother, but he could think of no way out; he wrote only that if the matter came to a scandal there would be nothing for him to do but to kill himself. This was one reason more for her silence, and Mrs. Thorne faded to a wan shadow of her former sunny self.

As she looked down from the balcony, she was like a woman suffering from a deathly illness. A

new terror had come to her heart because her husband had gone away so early without telling her why or whither he had gone. When she saw him coming towards the door of the hotel, pale and drooping, and when she saw Mrs. Bernauer beside him, her heart seemed to stand still. She crept back from the window and stood in the middle of the room as Herbert Thorne and his former nurse entered.

"What has happened?" This was all she could say as she looked into the distraught face of the housekeeper, into her husband's sad eyes.

He led her to a chair, then knelt beside her and told her all.

"Outside the door stands the man who will take me back to Vienna—and you, my dearest, you must go to your father." He concluded his story with these words.

She bent down over him and kissed him. "No, I am going with you," she said softly, strangely calm; "why should I leave you now? Is it not I who am the cause of this dreadful thing?"

And then she made her confession, much too late. And she went with him, back to the city of their home. It seemed to them both quite natural that she should do so.

When the Northern Express rolled out of Venice that afternoon, three people sat together in a compartment, the curtains of which were drawn close. They were the unhappy couple and their faithful servant. And outside in the corridor of the railway carriage, a small, slight man walked up and down—up and down. He had pressed a gold coin into the conductor's hand, with the words: "The party in there do not wish to be disturbed; the lady is ill."

Herbert Thorne's trial took place several weeks later. Every possible extenuating circumstance was

brought to bear upon his sentence. Five years only was to be the term of his imprisonment, his punishment for the crime of a single moment of anger.

His wife waited for him in patient love. She did not go to Graz, but continued to live in the old mansion with the mansard roof. Her father was with her. The brother Theobald, the cause of all this suffering to those who had shielded him at the expense of their own happiness, had at last done the only good deed of his life—had put an end to his useless existence with his own hand.

Father and daughter waited patiently for the return of the man who had sinned and suffered for their sake. They spoke of him only in terms of the tenderest affection and respect.

And indeed, seldom has any condemned murderer met with the respect of the entire community as Herbert Thorne did. The tone of the newspapers, and public opinion, evinced by hundreds of letters from friends, acquaintances, and from strangers, was a great boon to the solitary man in his cell, and to the three loving hearts in the old house. And at the end of two years the clemency of the Monarch ended his term of imprisonment, and Herbert Thorne was set free, a step which met with the approval of the entire city.

He returned to the home where love and affection awaited him, ready to make him forget what he had suffered. But the silver threads in his dark hair and a certain quiet seriousness in his manner, and in the hearts of all the dwellers in the old mansion, showed that the occurrence of that fatal 27th of September had thrown a shadow over them all which was not to be shaken off.

Joseph Muller brought many other difficult cases to a successful solution. But for years after this

particular case had been won, he was followed, as by a shadow, by a man who watched over him, and who, whenever danger threatened, stood over the frail detective as if to take the blow upon himself. He is a clever assistant, too, and no one who had seen Johann Knoll the day that he was put into the cell on suspicion of murder would have believed that the idle tramp could become again such a useful member of society. These are the victories that Joseph Muller considers his greatest.



## **THE CASE OF THE REGISTERED LETTER**





## THE CASE OF THE REGISTERED LETTER

"Oh, sir, save him if you can—save my poor nephew! I know he is innocent!"

The little old lady sank back in her chair, gazing up at Commissioner von Riedau with tear-dimmed eyes full of helpless appeal. The commissioner looked thoughtful. "But the case is in the hands of the local authorities, Madam," he answered gently, a strain of pity in his voice. "I don't exactly see how we could interfere."

"But they believe Albert guilty! They haven't given him a chance!"

"He cannot be sentenced without sufficient proof of his guilt."

"But the trial, the horrible trial—it will kill him—his heart is weak. I thought—I thought you might send some one—some one of your detectives—to find out the truth of the case. You must have the best people here in Vienna. Oh, my poor Albert——" Her voice died away in a suppressed sob, and she covered her face to keep back the tears.

The commissioner pressed a bell on his desk. "Is Detective Joseph Muller anywhere about the building?" he asked of the attendant who appeared at the door.

"I think he is, sir. I saw him come in not long ago."

"Ask him to come up to this room. Say I would like to speak to him." The attendant went out.

"I have sent for one of the best men on our force, Madam," continued the commissioner, turning back

to the pathetic little figure in the chair. "We will go into this matter a little more in detail and see if it is possible for us to interfere with the work of the local authorities in G——"

The little old lady gave her eyes a last hasty dab with a dainty handkerchief and raised her head again, fighting for self-control. She was a quaint little figure, with soft grey hair drawn back smoothly from a gentle-featured face in which each wrinkle seemed the seal of some loving thought for others. Her bonnet and gown were of excellent material in delicate soft colours, but cut in the style of an earlier decade. The capable lines of her thin little hands showed through the fabric of her grey gloves. Her whole attitude bore the impress of one who had adventured far beyond the customary routine of her home circle, adventured out into the world in fear and trembling, impelled by the stress of a great love.

A knock was heard at the door, and a small, slight man, with a kind, smooth-shaven face, entered at the commissioner's call. "You sent for me, sir?" he asked.

"Yes, Muller, there is a matter here in which I need your advice, your assistance, perhaps. This is Detective Muller, Miss ——" (the commissioner picked up the card on his desk) "Miss Graumann. If you will tell us now, more in detail, all that you *can* tell us about this case, we may be able to help you."

"Oh, if you would," murmured Miss Graumann, with something more of hope in her voice. The expression of sympathetic interest on the face of the newcomer had already won her confidence for him. Her slight figure straightened up in the chair, and the two men sat down opposite her, prepared to listen to her story.

"I will tell you all I know and understand about

this matter, gentlemen," she began. "My name is Babette Graumann, and I live with my nephew, Albert Graumann, engineering expert, in the village of Grünau, which is not far from the city of G——. My nephew Albert, the dearest, truest——" sobs threatened to overcome her again, but she mastered them bravely. "Albert is now in prison, accused of the murder of his friend, John Siders, in the latter's lodgings in G——."

"Yes, that is the gist of what you have already told me," said the commissioner. "Muller, Miss Graumann believes her nephew innocent, contrary to the opinion of the local authorities in G——. She has come to ask for some one from here who could ferret out the truth of this matter. You are free now, and if we find that it can be done without offending the local authorities——"

"Who is the commissioner in charge of the case in G——?" asked Muller.

"Commissioner Lange is his name, I believe," replied Miss Graumann.

"H'm!" Muller and the commissioner exchanged glances.

"I think we can venture to hear more of this," said the commissioner, as if in answer to their unspoken thought. "Can you give us the details now, Madam? Who is, or rather who was, this John Siders?"

"John Siders came to our village a little over a year ago," continued Miss Graumann. "He came from Chicago, he told us, although he was evidently a German by birth. He bought a nice little piece of property, not far from our home, and settled down there. He was a quiet man and made few friends, but he seemed to take to Albert and came to see us frequently. Albert had spent some years in America, in Chicago, and Siders liked to talk to him about

things and people there. But one day Siders suddenly sold his property and moved to G—. Two weeks later he was found dead in his lodgings in the city, murdered, and now—now they have accused Albert of the crime.”

“On what grounds?—oh, I beg your pardon, sir; I did not mean——”

“That’s all right, Muller,” said the commissioner. “As you may have to undertake the case, you might as well begin to do the questioning now.”

“They say”—Miss Graumann’s voice quavered—“they say that Albert was the last person known to have been in Sider’s room; they say that it was his revolver, found in the room. That is the dreadful part of it—it *was* his revolver. He acknowledges it, but he did not know, until the police showed it to him, that the weapon was not in its usual place in his study. They tell me that everything speaks for his guilt, but I cannot believe it—I cannot. He says he is innocent in spite of everything. I believe him. I brought him up, sir; I was like his own mother to him. He never knew any other mother. He never lied to me, not once, when he was a little boy, and I don’t believe he’d lie to me now, now that he’s a man of forty-five. He says he did not kill John Siders. Oh, I know, even without his saying it, that he would not do such a thing.”

“Can you tell us anything more about the murder itself?” questioned Muller gently. “Is there any possibility of suicide? Or was there a robbery?”

“They say it was no suicide, sir, and that there was a large sum of money missing. But why should Albert take any one else’s money? He has money of his own, and he earns a good income besides—we have all that we need. Oh, it’s some dreadful mistake! There is the newspaper account of the discovery of the body. Perhaps Mr. Muller might like to read

that." She pointed to a sheet of newspaper on the desk. The commissioner handed it to Muller. It was an evening paper, dated G——, September 24th, and it gave an elaborate account, in provincial journalese, of the discovery that morning of the body of John Siders, evidently murdered, in his lodgings. The main facts to be gathered from the long-winded story were as follows:

John Siders had rented the rooms in which he met his death about ten days before, paying a month's rent in advance. The lodgings consisted of two rooms in a little house in a quiet street. It was a street of simple two-story, one and two family dwellings, occupied by artisans and small tradespeople. There were many open spaces, gardens and vacant lots in the street. The house in which Siders lodged belonged to a travelling salesman by the name of Winter. The man was away from home a great deal, and his wife, with her child and an old servant, lived in the lower part of the house, while the rooms occupied by Siders were in the upper story. Siders lived very quietly, going out frequently in the afternoon, but returning early in the evening. He had said to his landlady that he had many friends in G——. But during the time of his stay in the house he had had but one caller, a gentleman who came on the evening of the 23rd of September. The old maid had opened the door for him and showed him to Mr. Siders' rooms. She described this visitor as having a full black beard, and wearing a broad-brimmed grey felt hat. Nobody saw the man go out, for the old maid, the only person in the house at the time, had retired early. Mrs. Winter and her little girl were spending the night with the former's mother in a distant part of the city. The next morning the old servant, taking the lodger's coffee up to him at the usual hour, found him dead on the floor of his sitting-room, shot

through the heart. The woman ran screaming from the house and alarmed the neighbours. A policeman at the corner heard the noise, and led the crowd up to the room where the dead man lay. It was plain to be seen that this was not a case of suicide. Everywhere were signs of a terrible struggle. The furniture was overturned, the dressing-table and the cupboard were open and their contents scattered on the floor, one of the window curtains was torn into strips, as if the victim had been trying to escape by way of the window, but had been dragged back into the room by his murderer. An overturned ink bottle on the table had spattered wide, and added to the general confusion. In the midst of the disorder lay the body of the murdered man, now cold in the rigour of death.

The police commissioner arrived soon, took possession of the rooms, and made a thorough examination of the premises. A letter found on the desk gave another proof, if such were needed, that this was not a case of suicide. This letter was in the handwriting of the dead man, and read as follows:

*Dear Friend:*

I appreciate greatly all the kindness shown me by yourself and your good wife. I have been more successful than I thought possible in overcoming the obstacles you know of. Therefore, I shall be very glad to join you day after to-morrow, Sunday, in the proposed excursion. I will call for you at 8 A. M.—the cab and the champagne will be my share of the trip. We'll have a jolly day and drink a glass or two to our plans for the future.

With best greetings for both of you,

Your old friend,

JOHN.

G—, *Friday, Sept. 23rd.*

An envelope, not yet addressed, lay beside this letter. It was clear that the man who penned these words had no thought of suicide. On the contrary, he was looking forward to a day of pleasure in the near future, and laying plans for the time to come.

The murderer's bullet had pierced a heart pulsing with the joy of life.

This was the gist of the account in the evening paper. Muller read it through carefully, lingering over several points which seemed to interest him particularly. Then he turned to Miss Babette Graumann.

"And then what happened?" he asked.

"Then the Police Commissioner came to Grünau and questioned my nephew. They had found out that Albert was Mr. Siders' only friend here. And late that evening the Mayor and the Commissioner came to our house with the revolver they had found in the room in G——, and they—they——" her voice trembled again, "they arrested my dear boy and took him away."

"Have you visited him in prison? What does he say about it himself?"

"He seems quite hopeless. He says that he is innocent—oh, I know he is—but everything is against him. He acknowledges that it was he who was in Mr. Siders' room the evening before the murder. He went there because Siders wrote him to come. He says he left early, and that John acted queerly. He knows they will not believe his story. This worry and anxiety will kill him. He has a serious heart trouble; he has suffered from it for years, and it has been growing steadily worse. I dare not think what this excitement may do for him." Miss Graumann broke down again and sobbed aloud. Muller laid his hands soothingly on the little old fingers that gripped the arm of the chair.

"Did your nephew send you here to ask for help?" he inquired very gently.

"Oh, no." The old lady looked up at him through her tears. "No, he would not have done that. I'm afraid that he'll be angry if he knows that I have come. He seemed so hopeless, so dazed. I just



couldn't stand it. It seemed to me that the police in G—— were taking things for granted, and just sitting there waiting for an innocent man to confess, instead of looking for the real murderer, who may be gone, the Lord knows where, by now!" Miss Graumann's faded cheeks flushed a delicate pink, and she straightened up in her chair again, while her eyes snapped defiance through the tears that hung on their lashes.

A faint gleam twinkled up in Muller's eyes, and he did not look at his chief. Doctor von Riedau's own face glowed in a slowly mounting flush, and his eyes drooped in a moment of conscious embarrassment at some recollection, the sting of which was evidently made worse by Muller's presence. But Commissioner von Riedau had brains enough to acknowledge his mistakes and to learn from them. He looked across the desk at Miss Graumann. "You are right, Madam, the police have made that mistake more than once. And a man with a clear record deserves the benefit of the doubt. We will take up this case. Detective Muller will be put in charge of it. And that means, Madam, that we are giving you the very best assistance the Imperial Police Force affords."

Miss Babette Graumann did not attempt to speak. In a wave of emotion she stretched out both little hands to the detective and clasped his warmly. "Oh, thank you," she said at last. "I thank you. He's just like my own boy to me; he's all the child I ever had, you know."

"But there are difficulties in the way," continued the commissioner in a business-like tone. "The local authorities in G—— have not asked for our assistance, and we are taking up the case over their heads, as it were. I shall have to leave that to Muller's diplomacy. He will come to G—— and have an interview with your nephew. Then he will have to

use his own judgment as to the next steps, and as to how far he may go in opposition to what has been done by the police there."

"And then I may go back home?" asked Miss Graumann. "Go home with the assurance that you will help my poor boy?"

"Yes, you may depend on us, Madam. Is there anything we can do for you here? Are you alone in the city?"

"No, thank you. There is a friend here who will take care of me. She will put me on the afternoon express back to G——."

"It is very likely that I will take that train myself," said Muller. "If there is anything that you need on the journey, call on me."

"Oh, thank you, I will indeed! Thank you both, gentlemen. And now good-bye, and God bless you!"

The commissioner bowed and Muller held the door open for Miss Graumann to pass out. There was silence in the room, as the two men looked after the quaint little figure slowly descending the stairs.

"A brave little woman," murmured the commissioner.

"It is not only the mother in the flesh who knows what a mother's love is," added Muller.

Next morning Joseph Muller stood in the cell of the prison in G—— confronting Albert Graumann, accused of the murder of John Siders.

The detective had just come from a rather difficult interview with Commissioner Lange. But the latter, though not a brilliant man, was at least good-natured. He acknowledged the right of the accused and his family to ask for outside assistance, and agreed with Muller that it was better to have some one in the official service brought in, rather than a private detective whose work, in its eventual results, might bring shame

on the police. Muller explained that Miss Graumann did not want her nephew to know that it was she who had asked for aid in his behalf, and that it could only redound to his, Lange's, credit if it were understood that he had sent to Vienna for expert assistance in this case. It would be a proof of his conscientious attention to duty, and would insure praise for him, whichever way the case turned out. Commissioner Lange saw the force of this argument, and finally gave Muller permission to handle the case as he thought best, rather relieved than otherwise for his own part. The detective's next errand was to the prison, where he now stood looking up into the deep-set, dark eyes of a tall, broad-shouldered, black-bearded man, who had arisen from the cot at his entrance. Albert Graumann had a strong, self-reliant face and bearing. His natural expression was somewhat hard and stern, but it was the expression of a man of integrity and responsibility. Muller had already made some inquiries as to the prisoner's reputation and business standing in the community, and all that he had heard was favourable. A certain hardness and lack of amiability in Graumann's nature made it difficult for him to win the hearts of others, but although he was not generally loved, he was universally respected. Through the signs of nagging fear, sorrow, and ill-health, printed clearly on the face before him, Muller's keen eyes looked down into the soul of a man who might be overbearing, pitiless even, if occasion demanded, but who would not murder—at least not for the sake of gain.

This last possibility Muller had dismissed from his mind, even before he saw the prisoner. The man's reputation was sufficient to make the thought ridiculous. But he had not made up his mind whether it might not be a case of a murder after a quarrel. Now he began to doubt even this when he looked into the

intelligent, harsh-featured face of the man in the cell. But Muller had the gift of putting aside his own convictions, when he wanted his mind clear to consider evidence before him.

Graumann had risen from his sitting position when he saw a stranger. His heavy brows drew down over his eyes, but he waited for the other to speak.

"I am Detective Joseph Muller, from Vienna," began the newcomer, when he had seen that the prisoner did not intend to start the conversation.

"Have you come to question me again?" asked Graumann wearily. "I can say no more than I have already said to the Police Commissioner. And no amount of cross-examination can make me confess a crime of which I am not guilty—no matter what evidence there may be against me." The prisoner's voice was hard and determined in spite of its note of physical and mental weariness.

"I have not come to extort a confession from you, Mr. Graumann," Muller replied gently, "but to help you establish your innocence, if it be possible."

A wave of colour flooded the prisoner's cheek. He gasped, pressed his hand to his heart, and dropped down on his cot. "Pardon me," he said finally, hesitating like a man who is fighting for breath. "My heart is weak; any excitement upsets me. You mean that the authorities are not convinced of my guilt, in spite of the evidence? You mean that they will give me the benefit of the doubt—that they will give me a chance for life?"

"Yes, that is the reason for my coming here. I am to take this case in hand. If you will talk freely to me, Mr. Graumann, I may be able to help you. I have seen too many mistakes of justice because of circumstantial evidence to lay any too great stress upon it. I have waited to hear your side of the story from yourself. I did not want to hear it from others.

Will you tell it to me now? No, do not move, I will get the stool myself."

Graumann sat back on the cot, his head resting against the wall. His eyes had closed while Muller was speaking, but his quieter breathing showed that he was mastering the physical attack which had so shaken him at the first glimpse of hope. He opened his eyes now and looked at Muller steadily for a moment. Then he said: "Yes, I will tell *you*: my life and my work have taught me to gauge men. I will tell you everything I know about this sad affair. I will tell you the absolute truth, and I think you will believe me."

"I will believe you," said Muller simply.

"You know the details of the murder, of course, and why I was arrested?"

"You were arrested because you were the last person seen in the company of the murdered man?"

"Exactly. Then I may go back and tell you something of my connection with John Siders?"

"It would be the very best thing to do."

"I live in Grünau, as you doubtless know, and am the engineering expert of large machine works there. My father before me held an important position in the factory, and my family have always lived in Grünau. I have travelled a great deal myself. I am forty-five years old, a childless widower, and live with my old aunt, Miss Babette Graumann, and my ward, Miss Eleonora Roemer, a young lady of twenty-two." Muller looked up with a slight start of surprise, but did not say anything. Graumann continued:

"A little over a year ago, John Siders, who signed himself as coming from Chicago, bought a piece of property in our town and came to live there. I made his acquaintance in the café and he seemed to take a fancy to me. I also had spent several years in Chi-

ago, and we naturally came to speak of the place. We discovered that we had several mutual acquaintances there, and enjoyed talking over the old times. Otherwise I did not take particularly to the man, and as I came to know him better I noticed that he never mentioned that part of his life which lay back of the years in Chicago. I asked a casual question once or twice as to his home and family, but he evaded me every time, and would not give a direct answer. He was evidently a German by birth and education, a man with university training, and one who knew life thoroughly. He had delightful manners, and when he could forget his shyness for a while, he could be very agreeable. The ladies of my family came to like him, and encouraged him to call frequently. Then the thing happened that I should not have believed possible. My ward, Miss Roemer, a quiet, reserved girl, fell in love with this man about whom none of us knew anything, a man with a past of which he did not care to speak.

"I was not in any way satisfied with the match, and they seemed to realise it. For Siders managed to persuade the girl to a secret engagement. I discovered it a month or two ago, and it made me very angry. I did not let them see how badly I felt, but I warned Lora not to have too much to do with the boy, and I set about finding out something regarding his earlier life. It was my duty to do this, as I was the girl's guardian. She has no other relative living, and no one to turn to except my aunt and myself. I wrote to Mr. Richard Tressider in Chicago, the owner of the factory in which I had been employed while there. John had told me that Tressider had been his client during the four years in which he practiced law in Chicago. I received an answer about the middle of August. Mr. Tressider had been able to find out only that John was born in the town of

Hartberg in a certain year. This was enough. I took leave of absence for a few days and went to Hartberg, which, as you know, is about 140 miles from here. Three days later I knew all that I wanted to know. John Siders was not the man's real name, or, rather, it was only part of his name. His full name was Theodor John Bellmann, and his mother was an Englishwoman whose maiden name was Siders. His father was a county official who died at an early age, leaving his widow and the boy in deepest poverty. Mrs. Bellmann moved to G—— to give music lessons. Theodor went to school there, then finally to college, and was an excellent pupil everywhere. But one day it was discovered that he had been stealing money from the banker in whose house he was serving as private tutor to the latter's sons. A large sum of money was missing, and every evidence pointed to young Bellmann as the thief. He denied strenuously that he was guilty, but the District Judge (it was the present Prosecuting Attorney Schmidt in G——) sentenced him. He spent eight months in prison, during which time his mother died of grief at the disgrace. There must have been something good in the boy, for he had never forgotten that it was his guilt that struck down his only relative, the mother who had worked so hard for him. He had atoned for this crime of his youth, and during the years that have passed since then, he had been an honest, upright man."

Graumann paused a moment and pressed his hand to his heart again. His voice had grown weaker, and he breathed hard. Finally he continued: "I commanded my ward to break off her engagement, as I could not allow her to marry a man who was a freed convict. Siders sold his property some few weeks after that and moved to G——. Eleonora acquiesced in my commands, but she was very unhappy and al-

lowed me to see very little of her. Then came the events of the evening of September 23rd, the events which have turned out so terribly. I will try to tell you the story just as it happened, so far as I am concerned. I had seen nothing of John since he left this town. He had made several attempts before his departure for G—— to change my opinion, and my decision as to his marriage to my ward. But I let him see plainly that it was impossible for him to enter our family with such a past behind him. He asserted his innocence of the charges against him, and declared that he had been unjustly accused and imprisoned. I am afraid that I was hard towards him. I begin to understand now, as I never thought I should, what it means to be accused of crime. I begin to realise that it is possible for every evidence to point to a man who is absolutely innocent of the deed in question. I begin to think now that John may have been right, that possibly he also may have been accused and sentenced on circumstantial evidence alone. I have thought much, and I have learned much in these terrible days."

The prisoner paused again and sat brooding, his eyes looking out into space. Muller respected his suffering and sat in equal silence, until Graumann raised his eyes to his again. "Then came the evening of the 23rd of September?"

"Yes, that evening—it's all like a dream to me," Graumann began again. "John wrote me a letter asking me to come to see him on that evening. I tore up the letter and threw it away—or perhaps, yes, I remember now, I did not wish Eleonora to see that he had written me. He asked me to come to see him, as he had something to say to me, something of the greatest importance for us both. He asked me not to mention to any one that I was to see him, as it would be wiser no one should know that we were still in



communication with each other. There was a strain of nervous excitement visible in his letter. I thought it better to go and see him as he requested; I felt that I owed him some little reparation for having denied him the great wish of his heart. It was my duty to make up to him in other ways for what I had felt obliged to do. I knew him for a nervous, high-strung man, overwrought by brooding for years on what he called his wrongs, and I did not know what he might do if I refused his request. It was not of myself I thought in this connection, but of the girl at home who looked to me for protection.

"I had no fear for myself; it never occurred to me to think of taking a weapon with me. How my revolver—and it is undoubtedly my revolver, for there was a peculiar break in the silver ornamentation on the handle which is easily recognisable—how this revolver of mine got into his room, is more than I can say. Until the Police Commissioner showed it to me two or three days ago, I had no idea that it was not in the box in my study where it is ordinarily kept."

Graumann paused again and looked about him as if searching for something. He rose and poured himself out a glass of water. "Let me put some of this in it," said Muller. "It will do you good." From a flask in his pocket he poured a few drops of brandy into the water. Graumann drank it and nodded gratefully. Then he took up his story again.

"I never discovered why Siders had sent for me. When I arrived at the appointed time I found the door of the house closed. I was obliged to ring several times before an old servant opened the door. She seemed surprised that it had been locked. She said that the door was always unlatched, and that Mr. Siders himself must have closed it, contrary to all custom, for she had not done it, and there was no one else in the house but the two of them. Siders

was waiting for me at the top of the stairs, calling down a noisy welcome.

"When I asked him finally what it was so important that he wanted to say to me, he evaded me and continued to chatter on about commonplace things. Finally I insisted upon knowing why he had wanted me to come, and he replied that the reason for it had already been fulfilled, that he had nothing more to say, and that I could go as soon as I wanted to. He appeared quite calm, but he must have been very nervous. For as I stood by the desk, telling him what I thought of his actions, he moved his hand hastily among the papers there and upset the ink-stand. I jumped back, but not before I had received several large spots of ink on my trousers. He was profuse in his apologies for the accident, and tried to take out the spots with blotting paper. Then at last, when I insisted upon going, he looked out to see whether there was still a light on the stairs, and led me down to the door himself, standing there for some time looking after me.

"I was slightly alarmed as well as angry at his actions. I believe that he could not have been quite in his right mind, that the strain of nervousness which was apparent in his nature had really made him ill. For I remember several peculiar incidents of my visit to him. One of these was that he almost insisted upon my taking away with me, ostensibly to take care of them, several valuable pieces of jewelry which he possessed. He seemed almost offended when I refused to do anything of the kind. Then, as I parted from him at the door, not in a very good humour I will acknowledge, he said to me: 'You will think of me very often in the future—more often than you would believe now!'

"This is all the truth, and nothing but the truth, about my visit to John Siders on the evening of Sep-

tember 23rd. 'As it had been his wish I said nothing to the ladies at home, or to any one else about the occurrence. And as I have told you, I destroyed his letter asking me to come to him.

"The following day about noon, the Commissioner of Police from G—— called at my office in the factory, and informed me bluntly that John Siders had been found shot dead in his lodgings that morning. I was naturally shocked, as one would be at such news, in spite of the fact that I had parted from the man in anger, and that I had no reason to be particularly fond of him. What shocked me most of all was the sudden thought that John had taken his own life. It was a perfectly natural thought when I considered his nervousness, and his peculiar actions of the evening before. I believe I exclaimed, 'It was a suicide!' almost without realising that I was doing so. The commissioner looked at me sharply and said that suicide was out of the question, that it was an evident case of murder. He questioned me as to Siders' affairs, of which I told only what every one here in the village knew. I did not consider it incumbent upon me to disclose to the police the disgrace of the man's early life. I had been obliged to hurt him cruelly enough because of that, and I saw no necessity for blackening his name, now that he was dead. Also, as according to what the commissioner said, it was a case of murder for robbery, I did not wish to go into any details of our connection with Siders that would cause the name of my ward to be mentioned. After a few more questions the commissioner left me. I was busy all the afternoon, and did not return to my home until later than usual. I found my aunt somewhat worried because Miss Roemer had left the house immediately after our early dinner, and had not yet returned. We both knew the girl to be still grieving over her broken engagement, and we dreaded the effect this last dreadful news might have on her.

We supposed, however, that she had gone to spend the afternoon with a friend, and were rather glad to be spared the necessity of telling her at once what had happened. I had scarcely finished my supper, when the door bell rang, and to my astonishment the Mayor of Grünau was announced, accompanied by the same Police Commissioner who had visited me in my office that morning. The Mayor was an old friend of mine and his deeply grave face showed me that something serious had occurred. It was indeed serious! and for some minutes I could not grasp the meaning of the commissioner's questions. Finally I realised with a tremendous shock that I—I myself was under suspicion of the murder of John Siders. The description given by the old servant of the man who had visited Siders the evening before, the very clothes that I wore, my hat and the trousers spotted by the purple ink, led to my identification as this mysterious visitor. The servant had let me in but she had not seen me go out.

"Then I discovered—when confronted suddenly with my own revolver which had been found on the floor of the room, some distance from the body of the dead man, that this same revolver had been identified as mine by my ward, Eleonora Roemer, who had been to the police station at G—— in the early afternoon hours. Some impulse of loyalty to her dead lover, some foolish feminine fear that I might have spoken against him in my earlier interviews with the commissioner had driven the girl to this step. A few questions sufficed to draw from her the story of her secret engagement, of its ending, and of my quarrel with John. I will say for her that I am certain she did not realise that all these things were calculated to cast suspicion on me. The poor girl is too unused to the ways of police courts, to the devious ways of the law, to realise what she was doing. The sight of my revolver broke her down

completely and she acknowledged that it was mine. That is all. Except that I was arrested and brought here as you see. I told the commissioner the story of my visit to John Siders exactly as I told it to you, but it was plain to be seen that he did not believe me. It is plain to be seen also, that he is firmly convinced of my guilt and that he is greatly satisfied with himself at having traced the criminal so soon."

"And yet he was not quite satisfied," said Muller gently. "You see that he has sent to the Capital for assistance on the case." Muller felt this little untruth to be justified for the sake of the honour of the police force.

"Yes, I'm surprised at that," said Graumann in his former tone of weariness. "What do you think you will be able to do about it?"

"I must ask questions here and there before I can form a plan of campaign," replied Muller. "What do you think about it yourself? Who do you think killed Siders?"

"How can I know who it was? I only know it is not I," answered Graumann.

"Did he have any enemies?"

"No, none that I knew of, and he had few friends either."

"You knew there was a sum of money missing from his rooms?"

"Yes, the sum they named to me was just about the price that he had received for the sale of his property here. They did me the honour to believe that if I had taken the money at all, I had done so merely as a blind. At least they did not take me for a thief as well as a murderer. If the money is really missing, it was for its sake he was murdered I suppose."

"Yes, that would be natural," said Muller. "And

you know nothing of any other relations or connections that the man may have had? Anything that might give us a clue to the truth?"

"No, nothing. He stood so alone here, as far as I knew. Of course, as I told you, his actions of the evening before having been so peculiar—and as I knew that he was not in the happiest frame of mind—I naturally thought of suicide at once, when they told me that he had been found shot dead. Then they told me that the appearance of the room and many other things, proved suicide to have been out of the question. I know nothing more about it. I cannot think any more about it. I know only that I am here in danger of being sentenced for the crime that I never committed—that is enough to keep any man's mind busy." He leaned back with an intense fatigue in every line of his face and figure.

Muller rose from his seat. "I am afraid I have tired you, Mr. Graumann," he said, "but it was necessary that I should know all that you had to tell me. Try and rest a little now and meanwhile be assured that I am doing all I can to find out the truth of this matter. As far as I can tell now I do not believe that you have killed John Siders. But I must find some further proofs that will convince others as well as myself. If it is of any comfort to you, I can tell you that during a long career as police detective I have been most astonishingly fortunate in the cases I have undertaken. I am hoping that my usual good luck will follow me here also. I am hoping it for your sake."

The man on the cot took the hand the detective offered him and pressed it firmly. "You will let me know as soon as you have found anything—anything that gives me hope?"

"I will indeed. And now save your strength and do not worry. I will help you if it is in my power."

After leaving the prison, Muller took the train for the village of Grünau, about half an hour distant from the city. He found his way easily to Graumann's home, an attractive old house set in a large garden amid groups of beautiful old trees. When he sent up his card to Miss Graumann, the old lady tripped down stairs in a flutter of excitement.

"Did you see him?" she asked. "You have been to the prison? What do you think? How does he seem?"

"He seems calm to-day," replied Muller, "although the confinement and the anxiety are evidently wearing on him."

"And you heard his story? And you believe him innocent?"

"I am inclined to do so. But there is more yet for me to investigate in this matter. It is certainly not as simple as the police here seem to believe. May I speak to your ward, Miss Roemer? She is at home now?"

"Yes, Lora is at home. If you will wait here a moment I will send her in."

Muller paced up and down the large sunny room, casting a glance over the handsome old pieces of furniture and the family portraits on the wall. It was evidently the home of generations of well-to-do, well-bred people, the narrow circle of whose life was made rich by congenial duties and a comfortable feeling of their standing in the community.

While he was studying one of the portraits more carefully, he became aware that there was some one in the room. He turned and saw a tall blond girl standing by the door. She had entered so softly that even Muller's quick ear had not heard the opening of the door.

"Do you wish to speak to me?" she said, coming down into the room. "I am Eleonora Roemer."

Her face, which could be called handsome in its even regularity of feature and delicate skin, was very pale now, and around her eyes were dark rings that spoke of sleepless nights. Grief and mental shock were preying upon this girl's mind. "She is not the one to make a confidant of those around her," thought Muller to himself. Then he added aloud: "If it does not distress you too much to talk about this sad affair, I will be very grateful if you will answer a few questions."

"I will tell you whatever I can," said the girl in the same low even tone in which she had first spoken. "Miss Graumann tells me that you have come from Vienna to take up this case. It is only natural that we should want to give you every assistance in our power."

"What is your opinion about it?" was Muller's next remark, made rather suddenly after a moment's pause.

The directness of the question seemed to shake the girl out of her enforced calm. A slow flush mounted into her pale cheeks and then died away, again leaving them whiter than before. "I do not know—oh, I do not know what to believe."

"But you do not think Mr. Graumann capable of such a crime, do you?"

"Not of the robbery, of course not; that would be absurd! But has it been clearly proven that there is a robbery? Might it not have been—might they not have——"

"You mean, might they not have quarrelled? Of course there is that possibility. And that is why I wanted to speak to you. You are the one person who could possibly throw light on this subject. Was there any other reason beyond the dead man's past that would render your guardian unwilling to have you marry him?"



Again the slow flush mounted to Eleonora Roemer's cheeks and her head drooped.

"I fear it may be painful for you to answer this," said Muller gently, "and yet I must insist on it in the interest of justice."

"He—my guardian—wished to marry me himself," the girl's words came slowly and painfully.

Muller drew in his breath so sharply that it was almost like a whistle. "He did not tell me that; it might—make a difference."

"That . . . that is . . . what . . . I fear," said the girl, her eyes looking keenly into those of the man who sat opposite. "And then, it was his revolver."

"Then you do believe him guilty?"

"It would be horrible, horrible—and yet I do not know what to think."

There was silence in the room for a moment. Miss Roemer's head drooped again and her hands twisted nervously in her lap. Muller's brain was very busy with this new phase of the problem. Finally he spoke.

"Let us dismiss this side of the question and talk of another phase of it, a phase of which it is necessary for me to know something. You would naturally be the person nearest the dead man, the one, the only one, perhaps, to whom he had given his confidence. Do you know of any enemies he might have had in the city?"

"No, I do not know of any enemies, or even of any friends he had there. When the terrible thing happened that clouded his past, when he had regained his freedom, after his term of imprisonment, there was no one left whom he cared to see again. He does not seem to have borne any malice towards the banker who accused him of the theft. The evidence was so strong against him that he felt the sus-

picion was justified. But there was hatred in his heart for one man, for the Justice who sentenced him, Justice Schmidt, who is now Attorney General in G——."

"The man who, in the name of the State, will conduct this case?" asked Muller quickly.

"Yes, I believe it is so. Is it not an irony that this man, the only one whom John really hated, should be the one to avenge him now?"

"H'm! yes. But did you know of any friends in G——?"

"No, none at all."

"No friends whom he might have made while he was in America and then met again in Germany?"

"No, he never spoke of any such to me. He told me that he made few friends. He did not seek them for he was afraid that they might find out what had happened and turn from him. He was morbidly sensitive and could not bear the disappointment."

"Why did he return to Germany?"

"He was lonely and wanted to come home again. He had made money in America—John was very clever and highly educated—but his heart longed for his own tongue and his own people."

Muller took a folded piece of paper from his pocket. "Do you know this handwriting?"

Miss Roemer read the few lines hastily and her voice trembled as she said: "This is John's handwriting. I know it well. This is the letter that was found on the table?"

"Yes, this letter appears to be the last he had written in life. Do you know to whom it could have been written? The envelope, as I suppose you know from the newspaper reports, was not addressed. Do you know of any friends with whom he could have been on terms of sufficient intimacy to write such a letter? Do you know what these plans for

the future could have been? It would certainly be natural that he should have spoken to you first about them."

"No; I cannot understand this letter at all," replied the girl. "I have thought of it frequently these terrible days. I have wondered why it was that if he had friends in the city, he did not speak to me of them. He repeatedly told me that he had no friends there at all, that his life should begin anew after we were married."

"And did he have any particular plans, in a business way, perhaps?"

"No; he had a comfortable little income and need have no fear for the future. John was, of course, too young a man to settle down and do nothing. But the only definite plans he had made were that we should travel a little at first, and then he would look about him for a congenial occupation. I always thought it likely he would resume a law practice somewhere. I cannot understand in the slightest what the plans are to which the letter referred."

"And do you think, from what you know of his state of mind when you saw him last, that he would be likely so soon to be planning pleasures like this?"

"No, no indeed! John was terribly crushed when my guardian insisted on breaking off our engagement. Until my twenty-fourth birthday I am still bound to do as my guardian says, you know. John's life and early misfortune made him, as I have already said, morbidly sensitive and the thought that it would be a bar to anything we might plan in the future, had rendered him so depressed that—and it was not the least of my anxieties and my troubles—that I feared . . . I feared anything might happen."

"You feared he might take his own life, do you mean?"

"Yes, yes, that is what I feared. But is it not terrible to think that he should have died this way—by the hand of—a murderer?"

"H'm! And you cannot remember any possible friend he may have found—some schoolboy friend of his youth, perhaps, with whom he had again struck up an acquaintance."

"Oh, no, no, I am positive of that. John could not bear to hear the names even of the people he had known before his misfortune. Still, I do remember his once having spoken of a man, a German he had met in Chicago and rather taken a fancy to, and who had also returned to Germany."

"Could this possibly have been the man to whom the letter is addressed?"

"No, no. This friend of John's was not married; I remember his saying that. And he lived in Germany somewhere—let me think—yes, in Frankfort-on-Main."

"And do you remember the man's name?"

"No, I cannot, I am sorry to say. John only mentioned it once. It was only by a great effort that I could remember the incident at all."

"And has it not struck you as rather peculiar that this friend, the one to whom the cordial letter was addressed, did not come forward and make his identity known? G—— is a city, it is true, but it is not a very large city, and any man being on terms of intimate acquaintance with one who was murdered would be apt to come forward in the hope of throwing some light on the mystery."

"Why, yes, I had not thought of that. It is peculiar, is it not? But some people are so foolishly afraid of having anything to do with the police, you know."

"That is very true, Miss Roemer. Still it is a queer incident and something that I must look into."

"What do you believe?" asked the girl tensely.

"I am not in a position to say as yet. When I am, I will come to you and tell you."

"Then you do not think that my guardian killed John—that there was a quarrel between the men?"

"There is, of course, a possibility that it may have been so. You know your guardian better than I do, naturally. Our knowledge of a man's character is often a far better guide than any circumstantial evidence."

"My guardian is a man of the greatest uprightness of character. But he can be very hard and pitiless sometimes. And he has a violent temper which his weak heart has forced him to keep in control of late years."

"All this speaks for the possibility that there may have been a quarrel ending in the fatal shot. But what I want to know from you is this—do you think it possible, that, this having happened, Albert Graumann would not have been the first to confess his unpremeditated crime? Is not this the most likely thing for a man of his character to do? Would he so stubbornly deny it, if it had happened?"

The girl started. "I had not thought of that! Why, why, of course . . . he might have killed John in a moment of temper, but he was never a man to conceal a fault. He is as pitiless towards his own weakness, as towards that of others. You are right, oh, you must be right. Oh, if you could take this awful fear from my heart! Even my grief for John would be easier to bear then."

Muller rose from his chair. "I think I can promise you that this load will be lifted from your heart, Miss Roemer."

"Then you believe—that it was just a case of murder for robbery? For the money? And John had some valuable jewelry, I know that."

"I do not know yet," replied Muller slowly, "but I will find out, I generally do."

"Oh, to think that I should have done that poor man such an injustice! It is terrible, terrible! This house has been ghastly these days. His poor aunt knows that he is innocent—she could never believe otherwise—she has felt the hideous suspicion in my mind—it has made her suffering worse—will they ever forgive me?"

"Her joy, if I can free her nephew, will make her forget everything. Go to her now, Miss Roemer, comfort her with the assurance that you also believe him to be innocent. I must hasten back to G—— and go on with this quest."

The girl stood at the doorway shaded by the overhanging branches of two great trees, looking down the street after the slight figure of the detective. "Oh, it is all easier to bear, hard as it is, easier now that this horrible suspicion has gone from my mind—why did I not think of that before?"

Alone in the corner of the smoking compartment in the train to G——, Muller arranged in his mind the facts he had already gathered. He had questioned the servants of John Siders' former household, had found that the dead man received very few letters, only an occasional business communication from his bank. Of the few others, the servants knew nothing except that he had always thrown the envelopes carelessly in the waste paper basket and had never seemed to have any correspondence which he cared to conceal. No friend from elsewhere had ever visited him in Grünau, and he had made few friends there except the Graumann family.

The facts of the case, as he knew them now, were such as to make it extremely doubtful that Graumann was the murderer. Muller himself had been

inclined to believe in the possibility of a quarrel between the two men, particularly when he had heard that Graumann himself was in love with his handsome ward. But the second thought that came to him then, impelled by the unerring instinct that so often guided him to the truth, was the assurance that in a case of this kind, in a case of a quarrel terminating fatally, a man like Albert Graumann would be the very first to give himself up to the police and to tell the facts of the case. Albert Graumann was a man of honour and unimpeachable integrity. Such a man would not persist in a foolish denial of the deed which he had committed in a moment of temper. There would be nothing to gain from it, and his own conscience would be his severest judge. "The disorder in the room?" thought Muller. "It'll be too late for that now. I suppose they have rearranged the place. I can only go by what the local detectives have seen, by the police reports. But I do not understand this extreme disorder. There is no reason why there should be a struggle when the robber was armed with a pistol. If Siders was supposed to have been interrupted when writing a letter, interrupted by a thief come with intent to steal, a thief armed with a revolver, the sight of this weapon alone would be sufficient to insure his not moving from his seat. I can understand the open drawers and cupboard; that is explained by the thief's hasty search for booty. But the torn window curtain and the overturned chairs are peculiar.

"Of course there is always a possibility that the thief might have entered one room while Siders was in the other; that the latter might have surprised the robber in his search for money or valuables, and that there might have been a hand-to-hand struggle before the intruder could pull out his revolver. Oh, if I could only have seen the body! This is working

under terrific difficulties. The marks of a hand-to-hand struggle would have been very plain on the clothes and on the person of the murdered man. But this letter? I do not understand this letter at all. It is the dead man's handwriting, that we know, but why did not the friend to whom it was addressed come forward and make himself known? As far as I can learn from the police reports in G——, there was no personal interest shown, no personal inquiries made about the dead man. There was only the natural excitement that a murder would create. Now a family, expecting to make a pleasure excursion with a friend in a day or two and suddenly hearing that this friend had been found murdered in his lodgings, would be inclined to take some little personal interest in the matter. These people must have been in town and at home, for the excursion spoken of in the letter was to occur two days after the murder. Miss Roemer's remark about the dread that some people have as to any connection with the police, is true to a limited extent only. It is true only of the ignorant mind, not of a man presumably well-to-do and properly educated. I do not understand why the man to whom this letter was addressed has not made himself known. The only explanation is—that there was no such man!" A sudden sharp whistle broke from the detective's lips.

"I must examine the dead man's personal effects, his baggage, his papers; there may be something there. His queer letter to Graumann—his desire that the latter's visit should be kept secret—a visit which apparently had no cause at all, except to get Graumann to the house, to get him to the house in a way that he should be seen coming, but should not be seen going away. What does this mean?

"Graumann was the only person against whom



Siders had an active cause of quarrel for the moment. There was one other man whom he hated, and this other man was the prosecuting attorney who would conduct any case of murder that came up in the town of G——.

"Now John Siders is found murdered—is found *killed*, in his lodgings, the morning after he has arranged things so that his antagonist, his rival in love, Albert Graumann, shall come under suspicion of having murdered him.

"What evidence have we that this man did not commit suicide? We have the evidence of the disorder in the room, a disorder that could have been made just as well by the man himself before he ended his own life. We have the evidence of a letter to some unknown, making plans for pleasure during the next days; and speaking of further plans, presumably concerning business, for the future. In a town the size of G——, where every one must have read of the murder, no one has come forward claiming to be the friend for whom this letter was written. Until this Unknown makes himself known, the letter as an evidence points rather to premeditated suicide than to the contrary. Oh, if I could only have seen the body! They tell me the pistol was found some little distance from the body. Is it at all likely that a murderer would go away leaving such evidence behind him? If Graumann had killed Siders in a hasty quarrel, he might possibly, in his excitement, have left his revolver. But I have already disposed of this possibility. A man of sufficient brains to so carefully plan his suicide as to conceal every trace of it and cast suspicion upon the man who had made him unhappy, such a one would be quite clever enough to throw the pistol far away from his body and to leave no traces of powder on his coat or any such other evidence.

"If I were to say now what I think, I would say that John Siders deliberately took his own life and planned it in such a way as to cast suspicion upon Albert Graumann. But that would indeed be a terrible revenge. And I must have some tangible proof of it before any court will accept my belief. This proof *must* be hidden somewhere. The thing for me to do is to find it."

The evidence gathered at the time of the death went to show that Siders had been paid a considerable sum in cash for the sale of his property at Grünau. And there was no trace of his having deposited this sum in any bank in G—— or in Grünau, in both of which places he had deposited other securities. Therefore the money had presumably been in his room at the time of his death. A search had been made for this money in every possible place of concealment among the dead man's belongings, and it had not been found. Muller asked the Police Commissioner to give him the key to the rooms, which were still officially closed, and also the keys to the dead man's pieces of baggage. Commissioner Lange seemed to think all this extra search quite unnecessary, as it did not occur to him that anything else was to be looked for except the money.

It was quite late when Muller began his examination of the dead man's effects. He was struck by the fact that there was scarcely a bit of paper to be found anywhere, no letters, no business papers, except bank books showing the amount of his securities in the bank in G—— and in Grünau, and giving facts about some investments in Chicago. There was nothing of more recent date and no personal correspondence whatever. The same was true of the pockets of the suit Siders had been wearing at the time of his death. A man of any property or position at all in the world gathers about him so

much of this kind of material that its absence shows premeditation. The suit Siders had been wearing when he was killed was lying on the table in the room. It was a plain grey business suit of good cut and material. The body had been prepared for burial in a befitting suit of black. Muller made a careful examination of the clothes, and found only what the police reports showed him had already been found by the examination made by the local authorities. Upon a second careful examination, however, he found that in one of the vest pockets there was a little extra pocket, like a change pocket, and in it he found a crumpled piece of paper. He took it out, smoothed and read it. It was a post office receipt for a registered letter. The date was still clear, but the name of the person to whom the letter had been addressed was illegible. The creases of the paper and a certain dampness, as if it had been inadvertently touched by a wet finger, had smeared the writing. But the letter had been sent the day before the death of John Siders, and it had been registered from the main post office in G—. This was sufficient for Muller. Then he turned to the desk. Here also there was nothing that could help him. But a sudden thought came to him, and he took up the blotting pad. This, to his delight, was in the form of a book with a handsome embroidered cover. It looked comparatively new and was, as Muller surmised, a gift from Miss Roemer to her betrothed. But few of the pages had been used, and on two of them a closely written letter had been blotted several times, showing that there had been several sheets of the letter. Muller held it up to the looking-glass, but the repeated blotting had blurred the writing to such an extent that it was impossible to decipher any but a few disconnected words, which gave no clue. On a page further along on the blotter, however, he

saw what appeared to be the impression of an address. He held it up to the glass and gave a whistle of delight. The words could be plainly deciphered here:

"MR. LEO PERNBURG,  
"FRANKFURT AM MAIN,  
"MAINZER LANDSTRASSE"

and above the name was a smear which, after a little study, could be deciphered as the written word "Registered."

With this page of the blotter carefully tucked away in his pocketbook, Muller hurried to the post office, arriving just at closing hour. He made himself known at once to the postmaster, and asked to be shown the records of registered letters sent on a certain date. Here he found scheduled a letter addressed to Mr. Leo Pernburg, Frankfurt am Main, sent by John Siders, G——, Josef Street 7.

Muller then hastened to the telegraph office and despatched a lengthy telegram to the postal authorities in Frankfurt am Main. When the answer came to him next morning, he packed his grip and took the first express train leaving G——. He first made a short visit, however, to Albert Graumann's cell in the prison. Muller was much too kind-hearted not to relieve the anxiety of this man, to whom such mental strain might easily prove fatal. He told Graumann that he was going in search of evidence which might throw light on the death of Siders, and comforted the prisoner with the assurance that he, Muller, believed Graumann innocent, and believed also that within a day or two he would return to G—— with proofs that his belief was the right one.

Three days later Muller returned to Grūnau and went at once to the Graumann home. It was quite

late when he arrived, but he had already notified Miss Roemer by telegram as to his coming, with a request that she should be ready to see him. He found her waiting for him, pale and anxious-eyed, when he arrived. "I have been to Frankfurt am Main," he said, "and I have seen Mr. Pernburg——"

"Yes, yes, that is the name; now I remember," interrupted the girl eagerly. "That is the name of John's friend there."

"I have seen Mr. Pernburg and he gave me this letter." Muller laid a thick envelope on the girl's lap.

She looked down at it, her eyes widening as if she had seen a ghost. "That—that is John's writing," she exclaimed in a hoarse whisper. "Where did it come from?"

"Pernburg gave it to me. The day before his death John Siders sent him this letter, requesting that Pernburg forward it to you before a certain date. When I explained the circumstances to Mr. Pernburg, he gave me the letter at once. I feel that this paper holds the clue to the mystery. Will you open it?"

With trembling hands the girl tore open the envelope. It enclosed still another sealed envelope, without an address. But there was a sheet of paper around this letter, on which was written the following:

*My beloved Eleonore:*

Before you read what I have to say to you here I want you to promise me, in memory of our love and by your hope of future salvation, that you will do what I ask you to do.

I ask you to give the enclosed letter, although it is addressed to you, to the Judge who will preside in the trial against Graumann. The letter is written to you and will be given back to you. For you, the beloved of my soul, you are the only human being with whom I can still communicate, to whom I can still express my wishes. But you must not give the letter to the Judge until you have assured yourself that the prosecuting at-

torney insists upon Graumann's guilt. In case he is acquitted, which I do not think probable, then open this letter in the presence of Graumann himself and one or two witnesses. For I wish Graumann, who is *innocent*, to be able to prove his innocence.

You will know by this time that I have determined to end my life by my own hand. Forgive me, beloved. I cannot live on without you—without the honour of which I was robbed so unjustly.

God bless you.

One who will love you even beyond the grave,

JOHN.

Remember your promise. It was given to the dead.

"Oh, what does it all mean?" asked Eleonora, dropping the letter in her lap.

"It is as I thought," replied Muller. "John Siders took his own life, but made every arrangement to have suspicion fall upon Graumann."

"But why? oh, why?"

"It was a terrible revenge. But perhaps—perhaps it was just retribution. Graumann would not understand that Siders could have been suspected of, and imprisoned for, a theft he had not committed. He must know now that it is quite possible for a man to be in danger of sentence of death even, for a crime of which he is innocent."

"Oh, my God! It is terrible." The girl's head fell across her folded arms on the table. Deep shuddering sobs shook her frame.

Muller waited quietly until the first shock had passed. Finally her sobs died away and she raised her head again. "What am I to do?" she asked.

"You must open this letter to-morrow in the presence of the Police Commissioner and Graumann."

"But this promise? This promise that he asks of me—that I should wait until the trial?"

"You have not given this promise. Would you take it upon yourself to endanger your guardian's life still more? Every further day spent in his prison, in this anxiety, might be fatal."

"But this promise? The promise demanded of me by the man to whom I had given my love? Is it not my duty to keep it?"

Muller rose from his chair. His slight figure seemed to grow taller, and the gentleness in his voice gave way to a commanding tone of firm decision.

"Our duty is to the living, not to the dead. The dead have no right to drag down others after them. Believe me, Miss Roemer, the purpose that was in your betrothed's mind when he ended his own life, has been fulfilled. Albert Graumann knows now what are the feelings of a man who bears the prison stigma unjustly. He will never again judge his fellow-men as harshly as he has done until now. His soul has been purged in these terrible days; have you the right to endanger his life needlessly?"

"Oh, I do not know! I do not know what to do."

"I have no choice," said Muller firmly. "It is *my* duty to make known the fact to the Police Commissioner that there is such a letter in existence. The Police Commissioner will then have to follow his duty in demanding the letter from you. Mr. Pernburg, Sider's friend, saw this argument at once. Although he also had a letter from the dead man, asking him to send the enclosure to you, registered, on a certain date, he knew that it was his duty to give all the papers to the authorities. Would it not be better for you to give them up of your own free will?" Muller took a step nearer the girl and whispered: "And would it not be a noble revenge on your part? You would be indeed returning good for evil."

Eleonora clasped her hands and her lips moved as if in silent prayer. Then she rose slowly and held out the letters to Muller. "Do what you will with them," she said. "My strength is at an end."

The next day, in the presence of Police Commis-

sioner Lange and of the accused Albert Graumann, Muller opened the letter which he had received from Miss Roemer and read it aloud. The girl herself, by her own request, was not present. Both Muller and Graumann understood that the strain of this message from the dead would be too much for her to bear. This was the letter:

G.— *September 21st.*

*My beloved:*

When you put this letter in the hands of the Judge, I will have found in death the peace that I could never find on earth. There was no chance of happiness for me since I have realised that I love you, that you love me, and that I must give you up if I am to remain what I have always been—in spite of everything—a man of honour.

Albert Graumann would keep his word, this I know. Wherever you might follow me as my wife, there his will would have been before us, blasting my reputation, blackening the name which you were to bear.

I could not have endured it. My soul was sick of all this secrecy, sick at the injustice of mankind. In spite of worldly success, my life was cold and barren in the strange land to which I had fled. My home called to me and I came back to it.

I kissed the earth of my own country, and I wept at my mother's grave. I was happy again under the skies which had domed above my childhood. For I am an honest man, beloved, and I always have been.

One day I sat at table beside the man—the Judge who condemned me, here in G—— in those terrible days. He naturally did not know me again. I, myself, brought the conversation around to a professional subject. I asked him if it were not possible that circumstantial evidence could lie; if the entire past, the reputation of the accused would not be a factor in his favour. The Judge denied it. It was his opinion, beyond a doubt, that circumstantial evidence was sufficient to convict anyone.

My soul rose within me. This infallibility, this legal arrogance, aroused my blood. "That man should have a lesson!" I said to myself.

But I had forgotten it all—all my anger, all my hatred and bitterness, when I met you. I dare not trust myself to think of you too much, now that everything is arranged for the one last step. It takes all my control to keep my decision unwavering while I sit here and tell you how much your love, your great tenderness, your sweet trust in me, meant to me.

Let me talk rather of Albert Graumann. I will forgive him for believing in my guilt, but I cannot forgive him that he, the



man of cultivation and mental grasp, could not believe it possible for a convicted thief to have repented and to have lived an honest life after the atonement of his crime. I still cannot believe that this was Graumann's opinion. I am forced to think that it was an excuse only on his part, an excuse to keep us apart, an excuse to keep you for himself.

You are lost to me now. There is nothing more in life for me. If the injustice of mankind has stained my honour beyond repair, has robbed me of every chance of happiness at any time and in any place, then I die easily, beloved, for there is little charm in such a life as would be mine after this.

But I do not wish to die quite in vain. There are two men who have touched my life, who need the lesson my death can teach them. These men are Albert Graumann and the prosecuting attorney Gustav Schmidt, the man who once condemned me so cruelly. His present position would make him the representative of the state in a murder trial, and I know his opinions too well not to foresee that he would declare Graumann guilty because of the circumstantial evidence which will be against him. My letter, given to the Presiding Judge after the Attorney has made his speech, will cause him humiliation, will ruin his brilliant arguments and cast ridicule upon him.

Do not think me hard or revengeful. I do not hate anyone now that death is so near. But is it inhuman that I should want to teach these two men a lesson? a lesson which they need, believe me, and it is such a slight compensation for the torture these last eight years have been to me!

And now I will explain in detail all the circumstances. I have arranged that Albert Graumann shall come to me on the evening of September 23rd between 7 and 8 o'clock. I asked him to do so by letter, asking him also to keep the fact of his visit to me a secret. To-night, the 22nd of September, I received his answer promising that he would come. Therefore I can look upon everything that is to happen, as having already happened, for now there need be no further change in my plans. I will send this letter this evening to my friend Pernburg in Frankfurt am Main. In case anything should happen that would render impossible for me to carry out my plans, I will send Pernburg another letter asking him not to carry out the instructions of the first.

I can now proceed to tell you what will happen here to-morrow evening, the 23rd of September.

Albert Graumann will come to me, unknown to his family or friends, as I have asked him to come. I will so arrange it that the old servant will see him come in but will not see him go out. My landlady will not be in my way, for she has already told me that she will spend the night of the 23rd with her mother, in another part of the city. It is to be a birthday celebration I believe, so that I can be certain her plans will not be changed.

Graumann and I will be alone, therefore, with no reliable witnesses near. I will keep him there for a little while with commonplace conversation, for I have nothing to say to him. If he moves near the desk I will upset the inkbottle. The spots on his clothes will be another evidence against him. I will endeavour to get him to keep my jewelry which is, as you know, of considerable value. I will tell him that I am going away for a while and ask him to take charge of it for me. I, myself, will take him down to the door and let him out, when I have satisfied myself that the old servant is in bed or at least at the back of the house. The revolver which shall end my misery is Graumann's property. I took it from its place without his knowledge.

The 10,000 gulden which I told my landlady were still in the house, and which would therefore be thought missing after my death, I have deposited in a bank in Frankfurt in your name. Here is the certificate of deposit.

I will endeavour not to hold the revolver sufficiently close to have the powder burn my clothes. And I will exert every effort of mind and body to throw it far from me after I have fired the fatal shot. I think that I will be able to do this, for I am a very good shot and I have no fear of death. One thing more I will do, to turn aside all suspicion of suicide. I will write a letter to some person who does not exist, a letter which will make it appear as if I were in excellent humour and planning for the future.

And now, good-bye to life. People have called me eccentric, they may be right. This last deed of mine, at least, is out of the ordinary. No one will say now that I ended my life in a moment of darkened mind, in a rush of despair. My brain is perfectly clear, my heart beats calmly, now that I have arranged everything for my departure from this world of falsehood and unreality. My last deed shall go to prove to the world how little actual, apparent *facts* can be trusted.

The one thing real, the one thing true in all this world of falsehood was your love and your trust. I thank you for it.

THEODOR BELLMANN,  
*known as*  
JOHN SIDERS.

Joseph Muller refuses to take any particular credit for this case. The letter would have come in time to prevent Graumann's conviction without his assistance, he says. The only person whose gratitude he has a right to is Prosecuting Attorney Gustav Schmidt. He managed to have the Police Commissioner in G— read the letter in detail to the attorney. But Muller

himself knows that it failed of its effect, so far as that dignitary was concerned. For nothing but open ridicule could ever convince a man of such decided opinions that he is not the one infallible person in the world.

But Albert Graumann had learned his lesson. And he told Muller himself that the few days of life which might remain to him were a gift to him from the detective. He felt that his weak heart would not have stood the strain and the disgrace of an open trial, even if that trial ended in acquittal. Two months later he was found dead in his bed, a calm smile on his lips.

Before he died he had learned that it was the undaunted courage of his timid little old aunt that had brought Muller to take charge of the case, and to free her beloved nephew from the dreaded prison. And the last days that these two passed together were very happy.

But as aforesaid, Muller refuses to have this case included in the list of his successes. He did not change the ultimate result, he merely anticipated it, he says.

**THE CASE OF THE POCKET DIARY FOUND  
IN THE SNOW.**



## CHAPTER I

### THE DISCOVERY IN THE SNOW

A QUIET winter evening had sunk down upon the great city. The clock in the old clumsy church steeple of the factory district had not yet struck eight, when the side door of one of the large buildings opened and a man came out into the silent street.

It was Ludwig Amster, one of the working-men in the factory, starting on his homeward way. It was not a pleasant road, this street along the edge of the city. The town showed itself from its most disagreeable side here, with malodorous factories, rickety tenements, untidy open stretches and dumping grounds offensive both to eye and nostril.

Even by day the street that Amster took was empty; by night it was absolutely quiet and dark, as dark as were the thoughts of the solitary man. He walked along, brooding over his troubles. Scarcely an hour before he had been discharged from the factory because of his refusal to submit to the injustice of his foreman.

The yellow light of the few lanterns show nothing but high board walls and snow drifts, stone heaps, and now and then the remains of a neglected garden. Here and there a stunted tree or a wild shrub bent their twigs under the white burden which the winter had laid upon them. Ludwig Amster, who had walked this street for several years, knew his path so well that he could take it blindfolded. The darkness did not worry him, but he walked somewhat more slowly

than usual, for he knew that under the thin covering of fresh-fallen snow there lay the ice of the night before. He walked carefully, watching for the slippery places.

He had been walking about half an hour, perhaps, when he came to a cross street. Here he noticed the tracks of a wagon, the trace still quite fresh, as the slowly falling flakes did not yet cover it. The tracks led out towards the north, out on to the hilly, open fields.

Amster was somewhat astonished. It was very seldom that a carriage came into this neighbourhood, and yet these narrow wheel-tracks could have been made only by an equipage of that character. The heavy trucks which passed these roads occasionally had much wider wheels. But Amster was to find still more to astonish him.

In one corner near the cross-roads stood a solitary lamp-post. The light of the lamp fell sharply on the snow, on the wagon tracks, and—on something else besides.

Amster halted, bent down to look at it, and shook his head as if in doubt.

A number of small pieces of glass gleamed up at him and between them, like tiny roses, red drops of blood shone on the white snow. All this was a few steps to one side of the wagon tracks.

"What can have happened here—here in this weird spot, where a cry for help would never be heard? where there would be no one to bring help?"

So Amster asked himself, but his discovery gave him no answer. His curiosity was aroused, however, and he wished to know more. He followed up the tracks and saw that the drops of blood led further on, although there was no more glass. The drops could still be seen for a yard further, reaching out almost to the board fence that edged the side-

walk. Through the broken planks of this fence the rough bare twigs of a thorn bush stretched their brown fingers. On the upper side of the few scattered leaves there was snow, and blood.

Amster's wide serious eyes soon found something else. Beside the bush there lay a tiny package. He lifted it up. It was a small, light, square package, wrapped in ordinary brown paper. Where the paper came together it was fastened by two little lumps of black bread, which were still moist. He turned the package over and shook his head again. On the other side was written, in pencil, the lettering uncertain, as if scribbled in great haste and in agitation, the sentence, "Please take this to the nearest police station."

The words were like a cry for help, frozen on to the ugly paper. Amster shivered; he had a feeling that this was a matter of life and death.

The wagon tracks in the lonely street, the broken pieces of glass and the drops of blood, showing that some occupant of the vehicle had broken the window, in the hope of escape, perhaps, or to throw out the package which should bring assistance—all these facts grouped themselves together in the brain of the intelligent working-man to form some terrible tragedy where his assistance, if given at once, might be of great use. He had a warm heart besides, a heart that reached out to this unknown who was in distress, and who threw out the call for help which had fallen into his hands.

He waited no longer to ponder over the matter, but started off at a full run for the nearest police station. He rushed into the room and told his story breathlessly.

They took him into the next room, the office of the commissioner for the day. The official in charge, who had been engaged in earnest conversation with



a small, frail-looking, middle-aged man, turned to Amster with a question as to what brought him there.

"I found this package in the snow."

"Let me see it."

Amster laid it on the table. The older man looked at it, and as the commissioner was about to open it, he handed him a paper-knife with the words: "You had better cut it open, sir."

"Why?"

"It is best not to injure the seals that fasten a package."

"Just as you say, Muller," answered the young commissioner, smiling. He was still very young to hold such an office, but then he was the son of a Cabinet Minister, and family connections had obtained this responsible position for him so soon. Kurt von Mayringen was his name, and he was a very good-looking young man, apparently a very good-natured young man also, for he took this advice from a subordinate with a most charming smile. He knew, however, that this quiet, pale-faced little man in the shabby clothes was greater than he, and that it was mere accident of birth that put him, Kurt von Mayringen, instead of Joseph Muller, in the position of superior.

The young commissioner had had most careful advice from headquarters as to Muller, and he treated the secret service detective, who was one of the most expert and best known men in the profession, with the greatest deference, for he knew that anything Muller might say could be only of value to him with his very slight knowledge of his business. He took the knife, therefore, and carefully cut open the paper, taking out a tiny little notebook, on the outer side of which a handsome monogram gleamed up at him in golden letters.

"A woman made this package," said Muller, who

had been looking at the covering very carefully; "a blond woman."

The other two looked at him in astonishment. He showed them a single blond hair which had been in one of the bread seals.

"*How I was murdered.*" Those were the words that Commissioner von Mayringen read aloud after he had hastily turned the first few pages of the notebook, and had come to a place where the writing was heavily underscored.

The commissioner and Amster were much astonished at these words, but the detective still gazed quietly at the seals of the wrapping.

"This heading reads like insanity," said the commissioner. Muller shrugged his shoulders, then turned to Amster. "Where did you find the package?"

"In Garden street."

"When?"

"About twenty minutes ago."

Amster gave a short and lucid account of his discovery. His intelligent face and well-chosen words showed that he had observation and the power to describe correctly what he had observed. His honest eyes inspired confidence.

"Where could they have been taking the woman?" asked the detective, more of himself than of the others.

The commissioner searched hastily through the notebook for a signature, but without success. "Why do you think it is a woman? This writing looks more like a man's hand to me. The letters are so heavy and——"

"That is only because they are written with a broad pen," interrupted Muller, showing him the writing on the package; "here is the same hand, but it is written with a fine hard pencil, and you can see distinctly that this is a woman's handwriting. And

besides, the skin on a man's thumb does not show the fine markings that you can see here on these bits of bread that have been used for seals."

The commissioner rose from his seat. "You may be right, Muller. We will take for granted, then, that there is a woman in trouble. It remains to be seen whether she is insane or not."

"Yes, that remains to be seen," said Muller dryly, as he reached for his overcoat.

"You are going before you read what is in the notebook?" asked Commissioner von Mayringen.

Muller nodded. "I want to see the wagon tracks before they are lost; it may help me to discover something else. You can read the book and make any arrangements you find necessary after that."

Muller was already wrapped in his overcoat. "Is it snowing now?" He turned to Amster.

"Some flakes were falling as I came here."

"All right. Come with me and show me the way." Muller nodded carelessly to his superior officer, his mind evidently already engrossed in thoughts of the interesting case, and hurried out with Amster. The commissioner was quite satisfied with the state of affairs. He knew the case was in safe hands. He seated himself at his desk again and began to read the little book which had come into his hands so strangely. His eyes ran more and more rapidly over the closely written pages, as his interest grew and grew.

When, half an hour later, he had finished the reading, he paced restlessly up and down the room, trying to bring order into the thoughts that rushed through his brain. And one thought came again and again, and would not be denied in spite of many improbabilities, and many strange things with which the book was full; in spite, also, of the varying, uncertain

handwriting and style of the message. This one thought was, "This woman is *not* insane."

While the young official was pondering over the problem, Muller entered as quietly as ever, bowed, put his hat and cane in their places, and shook the snow off his clothing. He was evidently pleased about something. Kurt von Mayringen did not notice his entrance. He was again at the desk with the open book before him, staring at the mysterious words, "*How I was murdered.*"

"It is a woman, a lady of position. And if she is mad, then her madness certainly has method." Muller said these words in his usual quiet way, almost indifferently. The young commissioner started up and snatched for the fine white handkerchief which the detective handed him. A strong sweet perfume filled the room. "It is hers?" he murmured.

"It is hers," said Muller. "At least we can take that much for granted, for the handkerchief bears the same monogram, A. L., which is on the notebook."

Commissioner von Mayringen rose from his chair in evident excitement. "Well?" he asked.

It was a short question, but full of meaning, and one could see that he was waiting in great excitement for the answer. Muller reported what he had discovered. The commissioner thought it little enough, and shrugged his shoulders impatiently when the other had finished.

Muller noticed his chief's dissatisfaction and smiled at it. He himself was quite content with what he had found.

"Is that all?" murmured the commissioner, as if disappointed.

"That is all," repeated the detective calmly, and added, "That is a good deal. We have here a closely

written notebook, the contents of which, judging by your excitement, are evidently important. We have also a handkerchief with an unusual perfume on it. I repeat that this is quite considerable. Besides this, we have the seals, and we know several other things. I believe that we can save this lady, of if it be too late, we can avenge her at least."

The commissioner looked at Muller in surprise. "We are in a city of more than a million inhabitants," he said, almost timidly.

"I have hunted criminals in two hemispheres, and I have found them," said Muller simply. The young commissioner smiled and held out his hand. "Ah, yes, Muller—I keep forgetting the great things you have done. You are so quiet about it."

"What I have done is only what any one could do who has that particular faculty. I do only what is in human power to do, and the cleverest criminal can do no more. Besides which, we all know that every criminal commits some stupidity, and leaves some trace behind him. If it is really a crime which we have found the trace of here, we will soon discover it." Muller's editorial "we" was a matter of formality. He might with more truth have used the singular pronoun.

"Very well, then, do what you can," said the commissioner with a friendly smile.

The older man nodded, took the book and its wrappings from the desk, and went into a small adjoining room.

The commissioner sent for an attendant and gave him the order to fetch a pot of tea from a neighbouring saloon. When the tray arrived, he placed several good cigars upon it, and sent it in to Muller. Taking a cigar himself, the commissioner leaned back in his sofa corner to think over this first interesting case of his short professional experience. That it con-

cerned a lady in distress made it all the more romantic.

In his little room the detective, put in good humour by the thoughtful attention of his chief, sat down to read the book carefully. While he studied its contents his mind went back over his search in the silent street outside.

He and Amster had hurried out into the raw chill of the night, reaching the spot of the first discovery in about ten or fifteen minutes. Muller found nothing new there. But he was able to discover in which direction the carriage had been going. The hoof marks of the single horse which had drawn it were still plainly to be seen in the snow.

"Will you follow these tracks in the direction from which they have come?" he asked of Amster. "Then meet me at the station and report what you have seen."

"Very well, sir," answered the workman. The two men parted with a hand shake.

Before Muller started on to follow up the tracks in the other direction, he took up one of the larger pieces of glass. "Cheap glass," he said, looking at it carefully. "It was only a hired cab, therefore, and a one-horse cab at that."

He walked on slowly, following the marks of the wheels. His eyes searched the road from side to side, looking for any other signs that might have been left by the hand which had thrown the package out of the window. The snow, which had been falling softly thus far, began to come down in heavier flakes, and Muller quickened his pace. The tracks would soon be covered, but they could still be plainly seen. They led out into the open country, but when the first little hill had been climbed a drift heaped itself up, cutting off the trail completely.

Muller stood on the top of this knoll at a spot

where the street divided. Towards the right it led down into a factory suburb; towards the left the road led on to a residence colony, and straight ahead the way was open, between fields, pastures and farms, over moors, to another town of considerable size lying beside a river. Muller knew all this, but his knowledge of the locality was of little avail, for all traces of the carriage wheels were lost.

He followed each one of the streets for a little distance, but to no purpose. The wind blew the snow up in such heaps that it was quite impossible to follow any trail under such conditions.

With an expression of impatience Muller gave up his search and turned to go back again. He was hoping that Amster might have had better luck. It was not possible to find the goal towards which the wagon had taken its prisoner—if prisoner she was—as soon as they had hoped. Perhaps the search must be made in the direction from which she had been brought.

Muller turned back towards the city again. He walked more quickly now, but his eyes took in everything to the right and to the left of his path. Near the place where the street divided a bush waved its bare twigs in the wind. The snow which had settled upon it early in the day had been blown away by the freshening wind, and just as Muller neared the bush he saw something white fluttering from one twig. It was a handkerchief, which had probably hung heavy and lifeless when he had passed that way before. Now when the wind held it out straight, he saw it at once. He loosened it carefully from the thorny twigs. A delicate and rather unusual perfume wafted up to his face. There was more of the odour on the little cloth than is commonly used by people of good taste. And yet this handkerchief was far too fine and delicate in texture to belong to the sort of

people who habitually passed along this street. It must have something to do with the mysterious carriage. It was still quite dry, and in spite of the fact that the wind had been playing with it, it had been but slightly torn. It could therefore have been in that position for a short time only. At the nearest lantern Muller saw that the monogram on the handkerchief was the same in style and initials as that on the notebook. It was the letters A. L.

## CHAPTER II

### THE STORY OF THE NOTEBOOK

It was warm and comfortable in the little room where Muller sat. He closed the windows, lit the gas, took off his overcoat—Muller was a pedantically careful person—smoothed his hair and sat down comfortably at the table. Just as he took up the little book, the attendant brought the tea, which he proceeded at once to enjoy. He did not take up his little book again until he had lit himself a cigar. He looked at the cover of the dainty little notebook for many minutes before he opened it. It was a couple of inches long, of the usual form, and had a cover of brown leather. In the left upper corner were the letters A. L. in gold. The leaves of the book, about fifty in all, were of a fine quality of paper and covered with close writing. On the first leaves the writing was fine and delicate, calm and orderly, but later on it was irregular and uncertain, as if penned by a trembling hand under stress of terror. This change came in the leaves of the book which followed the strange and terrible title, "*How I was murdered.*"

Before Muller began to read he felt the covers of



the book carefully. In one of them there was a tiny pocket, in which he found a little piece of wall paper of a noticeable and distinctly ugly pattern. The paper had a dark blue ground with clumsy lines of gold on it. In the pocket he found also a tramway ticket, which had been crushed and then carefully smoothed out again. After looking at these papers, Muller replaced them in the cover of the notebook. The book itself was strongly perfumed with the same odour which had exhaled from the handkerchief.

The detective did not begin his reading in that part of the book which followed the mysterious title, as the commissioner had done. He began instead at the very first words.

"Ah! she is still young," he murmured, when he had read the first lines. "Young, in easy circumstances, happy and contented."

These first pages told of pleasure trips, of visits from and to good friends, of many little events of every-day life. Then came some accounts, written in pencil, of shopping expeditions to the city. Costly laces and jewels had been bought, and linen garments for children by the dozen. "She is rich, generous, and charitable," thought the detective, for the book showed that the considerable sums which had been spent here had not been for the writer herself. The laces bore the mark, "For our church"; behind the account for the linen stood the words, "For the charity school."

Muller began to feel a strong sympathy for the writer of these notices. She showed an orderly, almost pedantic, character, mingled with generosity of heart. He turned leaf after leaf until he finally came to the words, written in intentionally heavy letters, "*How I was murdered.*"

Muller's head sank down lower over these mysterious words, and his eyes flew through the writing

that followed. It was quite a different writing here. The hand that penned these words must have trembled in deadly terror. Was it terror of coming death, foreseen and not to be escaped? or was it the trembling and the terror of an overthrown brain? It was undoubtedly, in spite of the difference, the same hand that had penned the first pages of the book. A few characteristic turns of the writing were plainly to be seen in both parts of the story. But the ink was quite different also. The first pages had been written with a delicate violet ink, the later leaves were penned with a black ink of uneven quality, of the kind used by poor people who write very seldom. The words of this later portion of the book were blurred in many places, as if the writer had not been able to dry them properly before she turned the leaves. She therefore had had neither blotting paper nor sand at her disposal.

And then the weird title!

Was it written at the dictation of insanity? or did A. L. know, while she wrote it, that it was too late for any help to reach her? Did she see her doom approaching so clearly that she knew there was no escape?

Muller breathed a deep breath before he continued his reading. Later on his breath came more quickly still, and he clinched his fist several times, as if deeply moved. He was not a cold man, only thoroughly self-controlled. In his breast there lived an unquenchable hatred of all evil. It was this that awakened the talents which made him the celebrated detective he had become.

"I fear that it will be impossible for any one to save me now, but perhaps I may be avenged. Therefore I will write down here all that has happened to me since I set out on my journey." These were the first words that were written under the mysterious

title. Muller had just read them when the commissioner entered.

"Will you speak to Amster; he has just returned?" he asked.

Muller rose at once. "Certainly. Did you telegraph to all the railway stations?"

"Yes," answered the commissioner, "and also to the other police stations."

"And to the hospitals? And to the various insane asylums?"

"No, I did not do that." Commissioner von Mayringen blushed, a blush that was as becoming to him as was his frank acknowledgement of his mistake. He went out to remedy it at once, while Muller heard Amster's short and not particularly important report. The workingman was evidently shivering, and the detective handed him a glass of tea with a good portion of rum in it.

"Here, drink this; you are cold. 'Are you ill?'"

Amster smiled sadly. "No, I am not ill, but I was discharged to-day and am out of work now—that's almost as bad."

"Are you married?"

"No, but I have an old mother to support."

"Leave your address with the commissioner. He may be able to find work for you; we can always use good men here. But now drink your tea." Amster drank the glass in one gulp. "Well, now we have lost the trail in both directions," said Muller calmly. "But we will find it again. You can help, as you are free now anyway. If you have the talent for that sort of thing, you may find permanent work here."

A gesture and a look from the workingman showed the detective that the former did not think very highly of such occupation. Muller laid his hand on the other's shoulder and said gravely: "You wouldn't care to take service with us? This sort of thing doesn't rate

very high, I know. But I tell you that if we have our hearts in the right place, and our brains are worth anything, we are of more good to humanity than many an honest citizen who wouldn't shake hands with us. There—and now I am busy. Good-night.”

With these words Muller pushed the astonished man out of the room, shut the door, and sat down again with his little book. This is what he read:

“Wednesday—is it Wednesday? They brought me a newspaper to-day which had the date of Wednesday, the 20th of November. The ink still smells fresh, but it is so damp here, the paper may have been older. I do not know surely on what day it is that I begin to write this narrative. I do not know either whether I may not have been ill for days and weeks; I do not know what may have been the matter with me—I know only that I was unconscious, and that when I came to myself again, I was here in this gloomy room. Did any physician see me? I have seen no one until to-day except the old woman, whose name I do not know and who has so little to say. She is kind to me otherwise, but I am afraid of her hard face and of the smile with which she answers all my questions and entreaties. “You are ill.” These are the only words that she has ever said to me, and she pointed to her forehead as she spoke them. She thinks I am insane, therefore, or pretends to think so.

“What a hoarse voice she has. She must be ill herself, for she coughs all night long. I can hear it through the wall—she sleeps in the next room. But I am not ill, that is I am not ill in the way she says. I have no fever now, my pulse is calm and regular. I can remember everything, until I took that drink of tea in the railway station. What could there have been in that tea? I suppose I should have noticed

how anxious my travelling companion was to have me drink it.

"Who could the man have been? He was so polite, so fatherly in his anxiety about me. I have not seen him since then. And yet I feel that it is he who has brought me into this trap, a trap from which I may never escape alive. I will describe him. He is very tall, stout and blond, and wears a long heavy beard, which is slightly mixed with grey. On his right cheek his beard only partly hides a long scar. His eyes are hidden by large smoked glasses. His voice is low and gentle, his manners most correct—except for his giving people poison or whatever else it was in that tea.

"I did not suffer any—at least I do not remember anything except becoming unconscious. And I seem to have felt a pain like an iron ring around my head. But I am *not* insane, and this fear that I feel does not spring from my imagination, but from the real danger by which I am surrounded. I am very hungry, but I do not dare to eat anything except eggs, which cannot be tampered with. I tasted some soup yesterday, and it seemed to me that it had a queer taste. I will eat nothing that is at all suspicious. I will be in my full senses when my murderers come; they shall not kill me by poison at least.

"When I came to my senses again—it was the evening of the day before yesterday—I found a letter on the little table beside my bed. It was written in French, in a handwriting that I had never seen before, and there was no signature.

"This strange letter demanded of me that I should write to my guardian, calmly and clearly, to say that for reasons which I did not intend to reveal, I had taken my own life. If I did this my present place of sojourn would be exchanged for a far more agreeable one, and I would soon be quite free. But if I

did not do it, I would actually be put to death. A pen, ink and paper were ready there for the answer.

"‘Never,’ I wrote. And then despair came over me, and I may have indeed appeared insane. The old woman came in. I entreated and implored her to tell me why this dreadful fate should have overtaken me. She remained quite indifferent and I sank back, almost fainting, on the bed. She laid a moist cloth over my face, a cloth that had a peculiar odour. I soon fell asleep. It seemed to me that there was some one else besides the woman in the room with me. Or was she talking to herself? Next morning the letter and my answer had disappeared.

"It was as I thought; there *was* some one else in my room. Some one who had come on the tramway. I found the ticket on the carpet beside my bed. I took it and put it in my notebook——

"I believe that it is Sunday to-day. It is four days now since I have been conscious. The first sound that I remember hearing was the blast of a horn. It must come from a factory very near me. The old windows in my room rattle at the sound. I hear it mornings and evenings and at noon, on week days. I did not hear it to-day, so it must be Sunday. It was Monday, the 18th of November, that I set out on my trip, and reached here in the evening—(here? I do not know where I am), that is, I set out for Vienna, and I know that I reached the Northern Railway station there in safety.

"I was cold and felt a little faint—and then *he* offered me the tea—and what happened after that? Where am I? The paper that they gave me may have been a day or two old or more. And to-day is Sunday—is it the first Sunday since my departure from home? I do not know. I know only this, that I set out on the 18th of November to visit my kind old guardian, and to have a last consultation with

him before my coming of age. And I know also that I have fallen into the hands of some one who has an interest in my disappearance.

"There is some one in the next room with the old woman. I hear a man's voice and they are quarrelling. They are talking of me. He wants her to do something which she will not do. He commands her to go away, but she refuses. What does he mean to do? I do not want her to leave me alone. I do not hate her any more; I know that she is not bad. When I listened I heard her speaking of me as of an insane person. She really believes that I am ill. When the man went away he must have been angry. He stamped down the stairs until the steps creaked under his tread. I know it is a wooden staircase therefore.

"I am safe from him to-day, but I am really ill of fright. Am I really insane? There is one thing that I have forgotten to write down. When I first came to myself I found a bit of paper beside me on which was written, 'Beware of calling in help from outside. One scream will mean death to you.' It was written in French like the letter. Why? Was it because the old woman could not read it? She knew of the piece of paper, for she took it away from me. It frightens me that I should have forgotten to write this down. Am I really ill? If I am not yet ill, this terrible solitude will make me so.

"What a gloomy room this is, this prison of mine. And such a strange ugly wall-paper. I tore off a tiny bit of it and hid it in this little book. Some one may find it some day and may discover from it this place where I am suffering, and where I shall die, perhaps. There cannot be many who would buy such a pattern, and it must be possible to find the factory where it was made. And I will also write down here what I can see from my barred window. Far down

below me there is a rusty tin roof, it looks like as if it might belong to a sort of shed. In front and to the right there are windowless walls; to the left, at a little distance, I can see a slender church spire, greenish in colour, probably covered with copper, and before the church there are two poplar trees of different heights.

"Another day has passed, a day of torturing fear! Am I really insane? I know that I see queer things. This morning I looked towards the window and I saw a parrot sitting there! I saw it quite plainly. It ruffled up its red and green feathers and stared at me. I stared back at it and suddenly it was gone. I shivered. Finally I pulled myself together and went to the window. There was no bird outside nor was there a trace of any in the snow on the window sill. Could the wind have blown away the tracks so soon, or was it really my sick brain that appeared to see this tropical bird in the midst of the snow? It is Tuesday to-day; from now on I will carefully count the days—the days that still remain to me.

"This morning I asked the old woman about the parrot. She only smiled and her smile made me terribly afraid. The thought that this thing which is happening to me, this thing that I took to be a crime, may be only a necessity—the thought fills me with horror! Am I in a prison? or is this the cell of an insane asylum? Am I the victim of a villain? or am I really mad? My pulse is quickening, but my memory is quite clear; I can look back over every incident in my life.

"She has just taken away my food. I asked her to bring me only eggs as I was afraid of everything else. She promised that she would do it.

"Are they looking for me? My guardian is Theodore Fellner, Cathedral Lane, 14. My own name is Asta Langen.



"They took away my travelling bag, but they did not find this little book and the tiny bottle of perfume which I had in the pocket of my dress. And I found this old pen and a little ink in a drawer of the writing table in my room.

"Wednesday. The stranger was here again to-day. I recognised his soft voice. He spoke to the woman in the hall outside my room. I listened, but I could catch only a few words. 'To-morrow evening—I will come myself—no responsibility for you.' Were these words meant for me? Are they going to take me away? Where will they take me? Then they do not dare to kill me here? My head is burning hot. I have not dared to drink a drop of liquid for four days. I dare not take anything into which they might have put some drug or some poison.

"Who could have such an interest in my death? It cannot be because of the fortune which is to be mine when I come of age; for if I die, my father has willed it to various charitable institutions. I have no relatives, at least none who could inherit my money. I had never harmed any one; who can wish for my death?

"There is somebody with her, somebody was listening at the door. I have a feeling as if I was being watched. And yet—I examined the door, but there is no crack anywhere and the key is in the lock. Still I seem to feel a burning glance resting on me. Ah! the parrot! is this another delusion? Oh God, let it end soon! I am not yet quite insane, but all these unknown dangers around me will drive me mad. I must fight against them.

"Thursday. They brought me back my travelling bag. My attendant is uneasy. She was longer in cleaning up the room than usual to-day. She seemed to want to say something to me, and yet she did not dare to speak. Is something to happen to-day then?

I did not close my eyes all night. Can one be made insane from a distance? hypnotised into it, as it were? I will not allow fear alone to make me mad. My enemy shall not find it too easy. He may kill my body, but that is all——”

These were the last words which Asta Langen had written in her notebook, the little book which was the only confidant of her terrible need. When the detective had finished reading it, he closed his eyes for a few minutes to let the impression made by the story sink into his mind.

Then he rose and put on his overcoat. He entered the commissioner's room and took up his hat and cane.

“Where are you going, Muller?” asked Herr Von Mayringen.

“To Cathedral Lane, if you will permit it.”

“At this hour? it is quarter past eleven! Is there any such hurry, do you think? There is no train from any of our stations until morning. And I have already sent a policeman to watch the house. Besides, I know that Fellner is a highly respected man.”

“There is many a man who is highly respected until he is found out,” remarked the detective.

“And you are going to find out about Fellner?” smiled the commissioner. “And this evening, too?”

“This very evening. If he is asleep I shall wake him up. That is the best time to get at the truth about a man.”

The commissioner sat down at his desk and wrote out the necessary credentials for the detective. A few moments later Muller was in the street. He left the notebook with the commissioner. It was snowing heavily, and an icy north wind was howling through the streets. Muller turned up the collar of

his coat and walked on quickly. It was just striking a quarter to twelve when he reached Cathedral Lane. As he walked slowly along the moonlit side of the pavement, a man stepped out of the shadow to meet him. It was the policeman who had been sent to watch the house. Like Muller, he wore plain clothes.

"Well?" the latter asked.

"Nothing new. Mr. Fellner has been ill in bed several days, quite seriously ill, they tell me. The janitor seems very fond of him.

"Hm—we'll see what sort of a man he is. You can go back to the station now, you must be nearly frozen standing here."

Muller looked carefully at the house which bore the number 14. It was a handsome, old-fashioned building, a true patrician mansion which looked worthy of all confidence. But Muller knew that the outside of a house has very little to do with the honesty of the people who live in it. He rang the bell carefully, as he wished no one but the janitor to hear him.

The latter did not seem at all surprised to find a stranger asking for the owner of the house at so late an hour. "You come with a telegram, I suppose? Come right up stairs then, I have orders to let you in."

These were the words with which the old janitor greeted Muller. The detective could see from this that Mr. Theodore Fellner's conscience must be perfectly clear. The expected telegram probably had something to do with the non-appearance of Asta Langen, of whose terrible fate her guardian evidently as yet knew nothing. The janitor knocked on one of the doors, which was opened in a few moments by an old woman.

"Is it the telegram?" she asked sleepily.

"Yes" said the janitor.

"No," said Muller, "but I want to speak to Mr. Fellner."

The two old people stared at him in surprise.

"To speak to him?" said the woman, and shook her head as if in doubt. "Is it about Miss Langen?"

"Yes, please wake him up."

"But he is ill, and the doctor——"

"Please wake him up. I will take the responsibility."

"But who are you?" asked the janitor.

Muller smiled a little at this belated caution on the part of the old man, and answered. "I will tell Mr. Fellner who I am. But please announce me at once. It concerns the young lady." His expression was so grave that the woman waited no longer, but let him in and then disappeared through another door. The janitor stood and looked at Muller with half distrustful, half anxious glances.

"It's no good news you bring," he said after a few minutes.

"You may be right."

"Has anything happened to our dear young lady?"

"Then you know Miss Asta Langen and her family?"

"Why, of course. I was in service on the estate when all the dreadful things happened."

"What things?"

"Why the divorce—and—but you are a stranger and I shouldn't talk about these family affairs to you. You had better tell me what has happened to our young lady."

"I must tell that to your master first."

The woman came back at this moment and said to Muller, "Come with me, please. Berner, you are to stay here until the gentleman goes out again."

Muller followed her through several rooms into

a large bed-chamber where he found an elderly man, very evidently ill, lying in bed.

"Who are you?" asked the sick man, raising his head from the pillow. The woman had gone out and closed the door behind her.

"My name is Muller, police detective. Here are my credentials."

Fellner glanced hastily at the paper. "Why does the police send to me?"

"It concerns your ward."

Fellner sat upright in bed now. He leaned over towards his visitor as he said, pointing to a letter on the table beside his bed, "Asta's overseer writes me from her estate that she left home on the 18th of November to visit me. She should have reached here on the evening of the 18th, and she has not arrived yet. I did not receive this letter until to-day."

"Did you expect the young lady?"

"I knew only that she would arrive sometime before the third of December. That date is her twenty-fourth birthday and she was to celebrate it here."

"Did she not usually announce her coming to you?"

"No, she liked to surprise me. Three days ago I sent her a telegram asking her to bring certain necessary papers with her. This brought the answer from the overseer of her estate, an answer which has caused me great anxiety. Your coming makes it worse, for I fear——" The sick man broke off and turned his eyes on Muller, eyes so full of fear and grief that the detective's heart grew soft. He felt Fellner's icy hand on his as the sick man murmured: "Tell me the truth! Is Asta dead?"

The detective shrugged his shoulders. "We do not know yet. She was alive and able to send a message at half past eight this evening."

"A message? To whom?"

"To the nearest police station." Muller told the story as it had come to him.

The old man listened with an expression of such utter dazed terror that the detective dropped all suspicion of him at once.

"What a terrible riddle," stammered the sick man as the other finished the story.

"Would you answer me several questions?" asked Muller. The old gentleman answered quickly, "Any one, every one."

"Miss Langen is rich?"

"She has a fortune of over three hundred thousand guildens, and considerable land."

"Has she any relatives?"

"No," replied Fellner harshly. But a thought must have flashed through his brain for he started suddenly and murmured, "Yes, she has one relative, a step-brother."

The detective gave an exclamation of surprise.

"Why are you astonished at this?" asked Fellner.

"According to her notebook, the young lady does not seem to know of this step-brother."

"She does not know, sir. There was an ugly scandal in her family before her birth. Her father turned his first wife and their son out of his house on one and the same day. He had discovered that she was deceiving him, and also that her son, who was studying medicine at the time, had stolen money from his safe. What he had discovered about his wife made Langen doubt whether the boy was his son at all. There was a terrible scene, and the two disappeared from their home forever. The woman died soon after. The young man went to Australia. He has never been heard of since and has probably come to no good."

"Might he not possibly be here in Europe again, watching for an opportunity to make a fortune?"

Fellner's hand grasped that of his visitor. The eyes of the two men gazed steadily at each other. The old man's glance was full of sudden helpless horror, the detective's eyes shone brilliantly. Muller spoke calmly: "This is one clue. Is there no one else who could have an interest in the young lady's death?"

"No one but Egon Langen, if he bear this name by right, and if he is still alive."

"How old would he be now?"

"He must be nearly forty. It was many years before Langen married again."

"Do you know him personally?"

"No."

"Have you a picture of Miss Langen?"

Fellner rang a bell and Berner appeared. "Give this gentleman Miss Asta's picture. Take the one in the silver frame on my desk"; the old gentleman's voice was friendly but faint with fatigue. His old servant looked at him in deep anxiety. Fellner smiled weakly and nodded to the man. "Sad news, Berner! Sad news and bad news. Our poor Asta is being held a prisoner by some unknown villain who threatens her with death."

"My God, is it possible? Can't we help the poor young lady?"

"We will try to help her, or if it is—too late, we will at least avenge her. My entire fortune shall be given up for it. But bring her picture now."

Berner brought the picture of a very pretty girl with a bright intelligent face. Muller took the picture out of the frame and put it in his pocket.

"You will come again? soon? And remember, I will give ten thousand guildens to the man who saves Asta, or avenges her. Tell the police to spare no expense—I will go to headquarters myself to-morrow."

Fellner was a little surprised that Muller, although

he had already taken up his hat, did not go. The sick man had seen the light flash up in the eyes of the other as he named the sum. He thought he understood this excitement, but it touched him unpleasantly and he sank back, almost frightened, in his cushions as the detective bent over him with the words "Good. Do not forget your promise, for I will save Miss Langen or avenge her. But I do not want the money for myself. It is to go to those who have been unjustly convicted and thus ruined for life. It may give the one or the other of them a better chance for the future."

"And you? what good do you get from that?" asked the old gentleman, astonished. A soft smile illumined the detective's plain features and he answered gently, "I know then that there will be some poor fellow who will have an easier time of it than I have had."

He nodded to Fellner, who had already grasped his hand and pressed it hard. A tear ran down his grey beard, and long after Muller had gone the old gentleman lay pondering over his last words.

Berner led the visitor to the door. As he was opening it, Muller asked: "Has Egon Langen a bad scar on his right cheek?"

Berner's eyes looked his astonishment. How did the stranger know this? And how did he come to mention this forgotten name.

"Yes, he has, but how did you know it?" he murmured in surprise. He received no answer, for Muller was already walking quickly down the street. The old man stared after him for some few minutes, then suddenly his knees began to tremble. He closed the door with difficulty, and sank down on a bench beside it. The wind had blown out the light of his lantern; Berner was sitting in the dark without knowing it, for a sudden terrible light had burst upon his



soul, burst upon it so sharply that he hid his eyes with his hands, and his old lips murmured, "Horrible! Horrible! The brother against the sister."

The next morning was clear and bright. Muller was up early, for he had taken but a few hours sleep in one of the rooms of the station, before he set out into the cold winter morning. At the next corner he found Amster waiting for him. "What are you doing here?" he asked in astonishment.

"I have been thinking over what you said to me yesterday. Your profession is as good and perhaps better than many another."

"And you come out here so early to tell me that?"

Amster smiled. "I have something else to say."

"Well?"

"The commissioner asked me yesterday if I knew of a church in the city that had a slender spire with a green top and two poplars in front of it."

Muller looked his interest.

"I thought it might possibly be the Convent Church of the Grey Sisters, but I wasn't quite sure, so I went there an hour ago. It's all right, just as I thought. And I suppose it has something to do with the case of last night, so I thought I had better report at once. I was on my way to the station."

"That will do very well. You have saved us much time and you have shown that you are eminently fitted for this business."

"If you really will try me, then——"

"We'll see. You can begin on this. Come to the church with me now." Muller was no talker, particularly not when, as now, his brain was busy on a problem.

The two men walked on quickly. In about half an hour they found themselves in a little square in the middle of which stood an old church. In front of the church, like giant sentinels, stood a pair of tall

poplars. One of them looked sickly and was a good deal shorter than its neighbour. Muller nodded as if content.

"Is this the church the commissioner was talking about?" queried Amster.

"It is," was the answer. Muller walked on toward a little house built up against the church, which was evidently the dwelling of the sexton.

The detective introduced himself to this official, who did not look over-intelligent, as a stranger in the city who had been told that the view from the tower of the church was particularly interesting. A bright silver piece banished all distrust from the soul of the worthy man. With great friendliness he inquired when the gentlemen would like to ascend the tower. "At once," was the answer.

The sexton took a bunch of keys and told the strangers to follow him. A few moments later Muller and his companion stood in the tiny belfry room of the slender spire. The fat sexton, to his own great satisfaction, had yielded to their request not to undertake the steep ascent. The cloudless sky lay crystal clear over the still sleeping city and the wide spread snow-covered fields which lay close at hand, beyond the church. On the one side were gardens and the low rambling buildings of the convent, and on the other were huddled high-piled dwellings of poverty.

Muller looked out of each of the four windows in turn. He spent some time at each window, but evidently without discovering what he looked for, for he shook his head in discontent. But when he went once more to the opening in the East, into which the sun was just beginning to pour its light, something seemed to attract his attention. He called Amster and pointed from the window. "Your eyes are younger than mine, lend them to me. [What do

you see over there to the right, below the tall factory chimney?" Muller's voice was calm, but there was something in his manner that revealed excitement. Amster caught the infection without knowing why. He looked sharply in the direction towards which Muller pointed, and began: "There is a tall house near the chimney, to the right of it, one wall touching it. The house is crowded in between other newer buildings, and looks to be very old and of a much better sort than its neighbours. The other houses are plain stone, but this house has carvings and statues on it, which are white with snow. But the house is in bad condition, one can see cracks in the wall."

"And its windows?"

"I cannot see them. They must be on the other side of the house, towards the courtyard which seems to be hemmed in by the blank walls of the other houses."

"And at the front of the house?"

"There is a low wall in front which shuts off the courtyard from a narrow, ill-kept street."

"Yes, I see it myself now. The street is bordered mainly by gardens and vacant lots."

"Yes, sir, that is it." Muller nodded as if satisfied. Amster looked at him in surprise, still more surprised, however, at the excitement he felt himself. He did not understand it, but Muller understood it. He knew that he had found in Amster a talent akin to his own, one of those natures who once having taken up a trail cannot rest until they reach their goal. He looked for a few moments in satisfaction at the assistant he had found by such chance, then he turned and hastened down the stairs again.

"We're going to that house?" asked Amster when they were down in the street. Muller nodded.

Without hesitation the two men made their way

through a tangle of dingy, uninteresting alleys, between modern tenements, until about ten minutes later they stood before an old three-storied building, which had a frontage of four windows on the street. "This is our place," said the detective, looking up at the tall, handsome gateway and the rococo carvings that ornamented the front of this decaying dwelling. It was very evidently of a different age and class from those about it.

Muller had already raised his hand to pull the bell, when he stopped and let it sink again. His eye caught sight of a placard pasted up on the wall of the next house, and already half torn off by the wind. The detective walked over, and raising the placard with his cane, read the words on it. "That's right," he said to himself. Amster gave a look on the paper. But he could not connect the contents of the notice with the case of the kidnapped lady, and he shook his head in surprise when Muller turned to him with the words: "The lady we are looking for is *not* insane." On the paper was announced in large letters that a reward would be offered to the finder of a red and green parrot which had escaped from a neighbouring house.

Muller rang the bell and they had to wait some few minutes before the door opened with great creakings, and the trowsled head of an old woman peered out.

"What do you want?" she asked hoarsely, with distrustful looks.

"Let us in, and then give us the keys of the upstairs rooms." Muller's voice was friendly, but the woman grew perceptibly paler.

"Who are you?" she stammered. Muller threw back his overcoat and showed her his badge. "But there is nobody here, the house is quite empty."

"There were a lady and gentleman here last evening." The woman threw a frightened look at Mul-

ler, then she said hesitatingly: "The lady was insane and has been taken to an asylum."

"That is what the man told you. He is a criminal and the police are looking for him."

"Come with me," murmured the woman. She seemed to understand that further resistance was useless. She carefully locked the outside door. Amster remained down stairs in the corridor, while Muller followed the old woman up the stairs. The staircase to the third story was made of wood. The house was evidently very old, with low ceilings and many dark corners.

The woman led Muller into the room in which she had cared for the strange lady at the order of the latter's "husband." He had told her that it was only until he could take the lady to an asylum. One look at the wall paper, a glance out of the window, and Muller knew that this was where Asta Langen had been imprisoned. He sat down on a chair and looked at the woman, who stood frightened before him.

"Do you know where they have taken the lady?"

"No, sir."

"Do you know the gentleman's name?"

"No, sir."

"You did not send the lady's name to the authorities?" \*

"No, sir."

"Were you not afraid you would get into trouble?"

"The gentleman paid me well, and I did not think that he meant anything bad, and—and——"

"And you did not think that it would be found out?" said Muller sternly.

\* Any stranger taking rooms in a hotel or lodging house must be registered with the police authorities by the proprietor of the house within forty-eight hours of arrival.

"I took good care of the lady."

"Yes, we know that."

"Did she escape from her husband?"

"He was not her husband. But now tell me all you know about these people; the more truthful you are the better it will be for you."

The old woman was so frightened that she could scarcely find strength to talk. When she finally got control of herself again she began: "He came here on the first of November and rented this room for himself. But he was here only twice before he brought the lady and left her alone here. She was very ill when he brought her here—so ill that he had to carry her upstairs. I wanted to go for a doctor, but he said he was a doctor himself, and that he could take care of his wife, who often had such attacks. He gave me some medicine for her after I had put her to bed. I gave her the drops, but it was a long while before she came to herself again.

"Then he told me that she had lost her mind, and that she believed everybody was trying to harm her. She was so bad that he was taking her to an asylum. But he hadn't found quite the right place yet, and wanted me to keep her here until he knew where he could take her. Once he left a revolver here by mistake. But I hid it so the lady wouldn't see it, and gave it to the gentleman the next time he came. He was angry at that, though I couldn't see why, and said I shouldn't have touched it."

The woman had told her story with much hesitation, and stopped altogether at this point. She had evidently suddenly realised that the lady was not insane, but only in great despair, and that people in such a state will often seek death, particularly if any weapon is left conveniently within their reach.

"What did this gentleman look like?" asked Mul-

ler, to start her talking again. She described her tenant as very tall and stout with a long beard slightly mixed with grey. She had never seen his eyes, for he wore smoked glasses.

"Did you notice anything peculiar about his face?"

"No, nothing except that his beard was very heavy and almost covered his face."

"Could you see his cheeks at all?"

"No, or else I didn't notice."

"Did he leave nothing that might enable us to find him?"

"No, sir, nothing. Or yes, perhaps, but I don't suppose that will be any good."

"What was it? What do you mean?"

"It gave him a good deal of trouble to get the lady into the wagon, because she had fainted again. He lost his glove in doing it. I have it down stairs in my room, for I sleep down stairs again since the lady has gone."

Muller had risen from his chair and walked over to the old writing desk which stood beside one window. There were several sheets of ordinary brown paper on it and a sharp pointed pencil and also something not usually found on writing desks, a piece of bread from which some of the inside had been taken.

"Everything as I expected it" he said to himself.

"The young lady made up the package in the last few moments that she was left alone here."

He turned again to the old woman and commanded her to lead him down stairs. "What sort of a carriage was it in which they took the lady away?" he asked as they went down.

"A closed coupé."

"Did you see the number?"

"No, sir. But the carriage was very shabby and so was the driver."

"Was he an old man?"

"He was about forty years old, but he looked like a man who drank. He had a light-coloured overcoat on."

"Good. Is this your room?"

"Yes, sir."

They were now in the lower corridor, where they found Amster walking up and down. The woman opened the door of the little room, and took a glove from a cupboard. Muller put it in his pocket and told the woman not to leave the house for anything, as she might be sent for to come to the police station at any moment. Then he went out into the street with Amster. When they were outside in the sunlight, he looked at the glove. It was a remarkably small size, made for a man with a slender, delicate hand, not at all in accordance with the large stout body of the man described by the landlady. Muller put his hand into the glove and found something pushed up into the middle finger. He took it out and found that it was a crumpled tramway ticket.

"Look out for a shabby old closed coupé, with a driver about forty years old who looks like a drunkard and wears a light overcoat. If you find such a cab, engage it and drive in it to the nearest police station. Tell them there to hold the man until further notice. If the cab is not free, at least take his number. And one thing more, but you will know that yourself,—the cab we are looking for will have new glass in the right-hand window." Thus Muller spoke to his companion as he put the glove into his pocket and unfolded the tramway ticket. Amster understood that they had found the starting point of the drive of the night before.

"I will go to all coupé stands," he said eagerly.

"Yes, but we may be able to find it quicker than that." Muller took the little notebook, which he was now carrying in his pocket, and took from it the



tramway ticket which was in the cover. He compared it with the one he had just found. They were both marked for the same hour of the day and for the same ride.

"Did the man use them?" asked Amster. The detective nodded. "How can they help us?"

"Somewhere on this stretch of the street railroad you will probably find the stand of the cab we are looking for. The man who hired it evidently arrived on the 6:30 train at the West Station—I have reason to believe that he does not live here,—and then took the street car to this corner. The last ticket is marked for yesterday. In the car he probably made his plans to hire a cab. So you had better stay along the line of the car tracks. You will find me in room seven, Police Headquarters, at noon to-day. The authorities have already taken up the case. You may have something to tell us then. Good luck to you."

Muller hurried on, after he had taken a quick breakfast in a little café. He went at once to headquarters, made his report there and then drove to Fellner's house. The latter was awaiting him with great impatience. There the detective gathered much valuable information about the first marriage of Asta Langen's long-dead father. It was old Berner who could tell him the most about these long-vanished days.

When he reached his office at headquarters again, he found telegrams in great number awaiting him. They were from all the hospitals and insane asylums in the entire district. But in none of them had there been a patient fitting the description of the vanished girl. Neither the commissioner nor Muller was surprised at this negative result. They were also not surprised at all that the other branches of the police department had been able to discover so little about the disappearance of the young lady. They were

aware that they had to deal with a criminal of great ability, who would be careful not to fall into the usual slips made by his kind.

There was no news from the cab either, although several detectives were out looking for it. It was almost nightfall when Amster ran breathlessly into room number seven. "I have him! he's waiting outside across the way!" This was Amster's report.

Muller threw on his coat hastily. "You didn't pay him, did you? On a cold day like this the drivers don't like to wait long in any one place."

"No danger. I haven't money enough for that," replied Amster with a sad smile. Muller did not hear him as he was already outside. But the commissioner with whom he had been talking and to whom Muller had already spoken of his voluntary assistant, entered into a conversation with Amster, and said to him finally: "I will take it upon myself to guarantee your future, if you are ready to enter the secret service under Muller's orders. If you wish to do this you can stay right on now, for I think we will need you in this case."

Amster bowed in agreement. His life had been troubled, his reputation darkened by no fault of his own, and the work he was doing now had awakened an interest and an ability that he did not know he possessed. He was more than glad to accept the offer made by the official.

Muller was already across the street and had laid his hand upon the door of the cab when the driver turned to him and said crossly, "Some one else has ordered me. But I am not going to wait in this cold, get in if you want to."

"All right. Now tell me first where you drove to last evening with the sick lady and her companion?" The man looked astonished but found his tongue again in a moment. "And who are you?" he asked calmly.

"We will tell you that upstairs in the police station," answered Muller equally calmly, and ordered the man to drive through the gateway into the inner courtyard. He himself got into the wagon, and in the course of the short drive he had made a discovery. He had found a tiny glass stopper, such as is used in perfume bottles. He could understand from this why the odour of perfume which had now become familiar to him was still so strong inside the old cab. Also why it was so strong on the delicate handkerchief. Asta Langen had taken the stopper from the bottle in her pocket, so as to leave a trail of odour behind her.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE LONELY COTTAGE

FIFTEEN minutes after the driver had made his report to Commissioner Von Mayringen, the latter with Amster entered another cab. A well-armed policeman mounted the box of this second vehicle. "Follow that cab ahead," the commissioner told his driver. The second cab followed the one-horse coupé in which Muller was seated. They drove first to No. 14 Cathedral Lane, where Muller told Berner to come with him. He found Mr. Fellner ready to go also, and it was with great difficulty that he could dissuade the invalid, who was greatly fatigued by his morning visit to the police station, from joining them.

The carriages then drove off more quickly than before. It was now quite dark, a gloomy stormy winter evening. Muller had taken his place on the box of his cab and sat peering out into the darkness. In spite of the sharp wind and the ice that blew against

his face the detective could see that they were going out from the more closely built up portions of the city, and were now in new streets with half-finished houses. Soon they passed even these and were outside of the city. The way was lonely and dreary, bordered by wooden fences on both sides. Muller looked sharply to right and to left.

"You should have become alarmed here," he said to the driver, pointing to one part of the fence.

"Why?" asked the man.

"Because this is where the window was broken."

"I didn't know that—until I got home."

"H'm; you must have been nicely drunk."

The driver murmured something in his beard.

"Stop here, this is your turn, down that street," Muller said a few moments later, as the driver turned the other way.

"How do you know that?" asked the man, surprised.

"None of your business."

"This street will take us there just the same."

"Probably, but I prefer to go the way you went yesterday."

"Very well, it's all the same to me." They were silent again, only the wind roared around them, and somewhere in the distance a fog horn moaned.

It was now six o'clock. The snow threw out a mild light which could not brighten the deep darkness around them. About half an hour later the first cab halted. "There's the house up there. Shall I drive to the garden gate?"

"No, stop here." Muller was already on the ground. "Are there any dogs here?" he asked.

"I didn't hear any yesterday."

"That's of no value. You didn't seem to hear much of anything yesterday." Muller opened the door of the cab and helped Berner out. The old

man was trembling. "That was a dreadful drive!" he stammered.

"I hope you will be happier on the drive back," said the detective and added, "You stay here with the commissioner now."

The latter had already left his cab with his companion. His sharp eyes glanced over the heavily shaded garden and the little house in its midst. A little light shone from two windows of the first story. The men's eyes looked toward them, then the detective and Amster walked toward a high picket fence which closed the garden on the side nearest its neighbours. They shook the various pickets without much caution, for the wind made noise enough to kill any other sound. Amster called to Muller, he had found a loose picket, and his strong young arms had torn it out easily. Muller motioned to the other three to join them. A moment later they were all in the garden, walking carefully toward the house.

The door was closed but there were no bars at the windows of the ground floor. Amster looked inquiringly at the commissioner and the latter nodded and said, "All right, go ahead."

The next minute Amster had broken in through one pane of the window and turned the latch. The inner window was broken already so that it was not difficult for him to open it without any further noise. He disappeared into the dark room within. In a few seconds they heard a key turn in the door and it opened gently. The men entered, all except the policeman, who remained outside. The blind of his lantern was slightly opened, and he had his revolver ready in his hand.

Muller had opened his lantern also, and they saw that they were in a prettily furnished corridor from which the staircase and one door led out.

The four men tiptoed up the stairway and the com-

missioner stepped to the first of the two doors which opened onto the upper corridor. He turned the key which was in the lock, and opened the door, but they found themselves in a room as dark as was the corridor. From somewhere, however, a ray of light fell into the blackness. The official stepped into the room, pulling Berner in after him. The poor old man was in a state of trembling excitement when he found himself in the house where his beloved young lady might already be a corpse. One step more and a smothered cry broke from his lips. The commissioner had opened the door of an adjoining room, which was lighted and handsomely furnished. Only the heavy iron bars across the closed windows showed that the young lady who sat leaning back wearily in an arm-chair was a prisoner.

She looked up as they entered. The expression of utter despair and deep weariness which had rested on her pale face changed to a look of terror; then she saw that it was not her would-be murderer who was entering, but those who came to rescue. A bright flush illumined her cheeks and her eyes gleamed. But the change was too sudden for her tortured soul. She rose from her chair, then sank fainting to the floor.

Berner threw himself on his knees beside her, sobbing out, "She is dying! She is dying!"

Muller turned on the instant, for he had heard the door on the other side of the hall open, and a tall slender man with a smooth face and a deep scar on his right cheek stood on the threshold looking at them in dazed surprise. For an instant only had he lost his control. The next second he was in his room again, slamming the door behind him. But it was too late. Amster's foot was already in the crack of the door and he pushed it open to let Muller enter. "Well done," cried the latter, and then he turned to

the man in the room. "Here, stop that. I can fire twice before you get the window open."

The man turned and walked slowly to the centre of the room, sinking down into an arm-chair that stood beside the desk. Neither Amster nor Muller turned their eyes from him for a moment, ready for any attempt on his part to escape. But the detective had already seen something that told him that Langen was not thinking of flight. When he turned to the desk, Muller had seen his eyes glisten while a scornful smile parted his thin lips. A second later he had let his handkerchief fall, apparently carelessly, upon the desk. But in this short space of time the detective's sharp eyes had seen a tiny bottle upon which was a black label with a grinning skull. Muller could not see whether the bottle was full or empty, but now he knew that it must hold sufficient poison to enable the captured criminal to escape open disgrace. Knowing this, Muller looked with admiration at the calmness of the villain, whose intelligent eyes were turned towards him in evident curiosity.

"Who are you and who else is here with you?" asked the man calmly.

"I am Muller of the Secret Service," replied his visitor and added, "You must put up with us for the time being, Mr. Egon Langen. The police commissioner is occupied with your step-sister, whom you were about to murder."

Langen put his hand to his cheek, looking at Muller between his lashes as he said, "To murder? Who can prove that?"

"We have all the proofs we need."

"I will acknowledge only that I wanted Asta to disappear."

Muller smiled. "What good would that have done you? You wanted her entire fortune, did you not? But that could have come to you only after thirty

years, and you are not likely to have waited that long. Your plan was to murder your step-sister, even if you could not get a letter from her telling of her intention to commit suicide."

Langen rose suddenly, but controlled himself again and sank back easily in his chair. "Then the old woman has been talking?" he asked.

Muller shook his head. "We knew it through Miss Langen herself."

"She has spoken to no one for over ten days."

"But you let her throw her notebook out of the window of the cab."

"Ah——"

"There, you see, you should not have let that happen."

Drops of perspiration stood out on Langen's forehead. Until now, perhaps, he had had some possible hope of escape. It was useless now, he knew.

As calmly as he had spoken thus far Muller continued. "For twenty years I have been studying the hearts of criminals like yourself. But there are things I do not understand about this case and it interests me very much."

Langen had wiped the drops from his forehead and he now turned on Muller a face that seemed made of bronze. There was but one expression on it, that of cold scorn.

"I feel greatly flattered, sir, to think that I can offer a problem to one of your experience," Langen began. His voice, which had been slightly veiled before, was now quite clear. "Ask me all you like. I will answer you."

Muller began: "Why did you wait so long before committing the murder? and why did you drag your victim from place to place when you could have killed her easily in the compartment of the railway train?"

"The windows of the compartment were open, my



honoured friend, and it was a fine warm evening for the season, because of which the windows in the other compartments were also open. There was nothing else I could do at that time then, except to offer Asta a cup of tea when she felt a little faint upon leaving the train. I am a physician and I know how to use the right drugs at the right time. When Asta had taken the tea, she knew nothing more until she woke up a day later in a room in the city."

"And the piece of paper with the threat on it? and the revolver you left so handy for her? oh, but I forgot, the old woman took the weapon away before the lady could use it in her despair," said Muller.

"Quite right. I see you know every detail."

"But why didn't you complete your crime in the room in the old house?" persisted Muller.

"Because I lost my false beard one day upon the staircase, and I feared the old woman might have seen my face enough to recognise me again. I thought it better to look for another place."

"And then you found this house."

"Yes, but several days later."

"And you hired it in the name of Miss Asta Langen? Who would then have been found dead here several days after you had entered the house?"

"Several days, several weeks perhaps. I preferred to wait until the woman who rented the house had read in the papers that Asta Langen had disappeared and was being sought for. Somebody would have found her here, and her identity would have easily been established, for I knew that she had some important family documents with her."

Muller was silent a moment, with an expression of deep pity on his face. Then he continued: "Yes, someone would have found her, and her suicide would have been a dark mystery, unless, of course, malicious tongues would have found ugly reasons enough why

a beautiful young lady should hide herself in a lonely cottage to take her own life."

Muller had spoken as if to himself. Egon Langen's lips parted in a smile so evil that Amster clenched his fists.

"And you would not have regretted this ruining the reputation as well as taking the life of an innocent girl?" asked the detective low and tense.

"No, for I hated her."

"You hated her because she was rich and innocent. She was very charitable and would gladly have helped you if you were in need. Beside this, you were entitled to a portion of your father's estate. It is almost thirty thousand guldens, as Mr. Fellner tells me. Why did you not take that?"

"Fellner did not know that I had already received twenty thousand of this when my father turned me out. He probably would have heard of it later, for Berner was the witness. I did not care for the remaining ten thousand because I would have the entire fortune after Asta's death. I would have seen the official notice and the call for heirs in Australia, and would have written from there, announcing that I was still alive. If you had come several days later I should have been a rich man within a year."

His clenched fist resting on his knee, the rascal stared out ahead of him when he ended his shameless confession. In his rage and disappointment he had not noticed that Muller's hand dropped gently to the desk and softly took a little bottle from under the handkerchief. Langen came out of his dark thoughts only when Muller's voice broke the silence. "But you miscalculated, if you expected to inherit from your sister. She is still a minor and your father's will would have given you only ten thousand guldens.

"But you forget that Asta will be twenty-four on the third of December."

"Ah, then you would have kept her alive until then."

"You understand quickly," said Langen with a mocking smile.

"But she disappeared on the eighteenth of November. How could you prove that she died *after* her birthday, therefore in full possession of her fortune and without leaving any will?"

"That is very simple. I buy several newspapers every day. I would have taken them up to the fourth and fifth of December and left them here with the body."

"You are more clever even than I thought," said the detective dryly as he heard the commissioner's steps behind him. Muller put a whistle to his lips and its shrill tone ran through the house, calling up the policeman who stood by the door.

Egon Langen's face was grey with pallor, his features were distorted, and yet there was the ghost of a smile on his lips as he saw his captors enter the door. He put his hand out, raised his handkerchief hastily and then a wild scream echoed through the room, a scream that ended in a ghastly groan.

"I have taken your bottle, you might as well give yourself up quietly," said Muller calmly, holding his revolver near Langen's face. The prisoner threw himself at the detective but was caught and overpowered by Amster and the policeman.

A quarter of an hour later the cabs drove back toward the city. Inside one cowered Egon Langen, watched by the policeman and Amster. Berner was on the box beside the driver, telling the now interested man the story of what had happened to his dear young lady. In the other cab sat Asta Langen with Kurt von Mayringen and Muller.

"Do you feel better now?" asked the young commissioner in sincere sympathy that was mingled with admiration for the delicate beauty of the girl beside him, an admiration heightened by her romantic story and marvellous escape.

Asta nodded and answered gently: "I feel as if some terrible weight were lifted from my heart and brain. But I doubt if I will ever forget these horrible days, when I had already come to accept it as a fact that—that I was to be murdered."

"This is the man to whom you owe your escape," said the commissioner, laying his hand on Muller's knee. Asta did not speak, but she reached out in the darkness of the cab, caught Muller's hand and would have raised it to her lips, had not the little man drawn it away hastily. "It was only my duty, dear young lady," he said. "A duty that is not onerous when it means the rescue of innocence and the preventing of crime. It is not always so, unfortunately—nor am I always so fortunate as in this case."

This indeed is what Muller calls a "case with a happy ending," for scarcely a year later, to his own great embarrassment, he found himself the most honoured guest, and a centre of attraction equally with the bridal couple, at the marriage of Kurt von Mayringen and Asta Langen. Muller asserts, however, that he is not a success in society, and that he would rather unravel fifty difficult cases than again be the "lion" at a fashionable function.



**THE CASE OF THE POOL OF BLOOD IN THE  
PASTOR'S STUDY.**



## I

THE sun rose slowly over the great bulk of the Carpathian mountains lying along the horizon, weird giant shapes in the early morning mist. It was still very quiet in the village. A cock crowed here and there, and swallows flew chirping close to the ground, darting swiftly about preparing for their higher flight. Janci the shepherd, apparently the only human being already up, stood beside the brook at the point where the old bridge spans the streamlet, still turbulent from the mountain floods. Janci was cutting willows to make his Margit a new basket.

Once the shepherd raised his head from his work, for he thought he heard a loud laugh somewhere in the near distance. But all seemed silent and he turned back to his willows. The beauty of the landscape about him was much too familiar a thing that he should have felt or seen its charm. The violet hue of the distant woods, the red gleaming of the heather-strewn moor, with its patches of swamp from which the slow mist arose, the pretty little village with its handsome old church and attractive rectory—Janci had known it so long that he never stopped to realise how very charming, in its gentle melancholy, it all was.

Also, Janci did not know that this little village of his home had once been a flourishing city, and that an invasion of the Turks had razed it to the ground leaving, as by a miracle, only the church to tell of former glories.

The sun rose higher and higher. And now the village awoke to its daily life. Voices of cattle and noises of poultry were heard about the houses, and men and women began their accustomed round of



tasks. Janci found that he had gathered enough willow twigs by this time. He tied them in a loose bundle and started on his homeward way.

His path led through wide-stretching fields and vineyards past a little hill, some distance from the village, on which stood a large house. It was not a pleasant house to look at, not a house one would care to live in, even if one did not know its use, for it looked bare and repellant, covered with its ugly yellow paint, and with all the windows secured with heavy iron bars. The trees that surrounded it were tall and thick-foliaged, casting an added gloom over the forbidding appearance of the house. At the foot of the hill was a high iron fence, cutting off what lay behind it from all the rest of the world. For this ugly yellow house enclosed in its walls a goodly sum of hopeless human misery and misfortune. It was an insane asylum.

For twenty years now, the asylum had stood on its hill, a source of superstitious terror to the villagers, but at the same time a source of added income. It meant money for them, for it afforded a constant and ever-open market for their farm products and the output of their home industry. But every now and then a scream or a harsh laugh would ring out from behind those barred windows, and those in the village who could hear, would shiver and cross themselves. Shepherd Janci had little fear of the big house. His little hut cowered close by the high iron gates, and he had a personal acquaintance with most of the patients, with all of the attendants, and most of all, with the kind elderly physician who was the head of the establishment. Janci knew them all, and had a kind word equally for all. But otherwise he was a silent man, living much within himself.

When the shepherd reached his little home, his wife came to meet him with a call to breakfast. As they

sat down at the table a shadow moved past the little window. Janci looked up. "Who was that?" asked Margit, looking up from her folded hands. She had just finished her murmured prayer.

"Pastor's Liska," replied Janci indifferently, beginning his meal. (Liska was the local abbreviation for Elizabeth.)

"In such a hurry?" thought the shepherd's wife. Her curiosity would not let her rest. "I hope His Reverence isn't ill again," she remarked after a while. Janci did not hear her, for he was very busy picking a fly out of his milk cup.

"Do you think Liska was going for the old man?" began Margit again after a few minutes.

The "old man" was the name given by the people of the village, more as a term of endearment than anything else, to the generally loved and respected physician who was the head of the insane asylum. He had become general mentor and oracle of all the village and was known and loved by man, woman and child.

"It's possible," answered Janci.

"His Reverence didn't look very well yesterday, or maybe the old housekeeper has the gout again."

Janci gave a grunt which might have meant anything. The shepherd was a silent man. Being alone so much had taught him to find his own thoughts sufficient company. Ten minutes passed in silence since Margit's last question, then some one went past the window. There were two people this time, Liska and the old doctor. They were walking very fast, running almost. Margit sprang up and hurried to the door to look after them.

Janci sat still in his place, but he had laid aside his spoon and with wide eyes was staring ahead of him, murmuring, "It's the pastor this time; I saw him—just as I did the others."

"Shepherd, the inn-keeper wants to see you, there's something the matter with his cow." cried a young man, coming from the other direction and pushing in at the door past Margit, who stood there staring up the road.

Janci was so deep in his own thoughts that he apparently did not hear the boy's words. At all events he did not answer them, but himself asked an unexpected question—a question that was not addressed to the others in the room, but to something out and beyond them. It was a strange question and it came from the lips of a man whose mind was not with his body at that moment—whose mind saw what others did not see.

"Who will be the next to go? And who will be our pastor now?"

These were Janci's words.

"What are you talking about, shepherd? Is it another one of your visions?" exclaimed the young fellow who stood there before him. Janci rubbed his hands over his eyes and seemed to come down to earth with a start.

"Oh, is that you, Ferenz? What do you want of me?"

The boy gave his message again, and Janci nodded good-humouredly and followed him out of the house. But both he and his young companion were very thoughtful as they plodded along the way. The boy did not dare to ask any questions, for he knew that the shepherd was not likely to answer. There was a silent understanding among the villagers that no one should annoy Janci in any way, for they stood in a strange awe of him, although he was the most good-natured mortal under the sun.

While the shepherd and the boy walked toward the inn, the old doctor and Liska had hurried onward to the rectory. They were met at the door by the aged

housekeeper, who staggered down the path wringing her hands, unable to give voice to anything but inarticulate expressions of grief and terror. The rest of the household and the farm hands were gathered in a frightened group in the great courtyard of the stately rectory which had once been a convent building. The physician hurried up the stairs into the pastor's apartments. These were high sunny and airy rooms with arched ceilings, deep window seats, great heavy doors and handsomely ornamented stoves. The simple modern furniture appeared still more plain and common-place by contrast with the huge spaces of the building.

In one of the rooms a gendarme was standing beside the window. The man saluted the physician, then shrugged his shoulders with an expression of hopelessness. The doctor returned a silent greeting and passed through into the next apartment. The old man was paler than usual and his face bore an expression of pain and surprise, the same expression that showed in the faces of those gathered down stairs. The room he now entered was large like the others, the walls handsomely decorated, and every corner of it was flooded with sunshine. There were two men in this room, the village magistrate and the notary. Their expression, as they held out their hands to the doctor, showed that his coming brought great relief. And there was something else in the room, something that drew the eyes of all three of the men immediately after their silent greeting.

This was a great pool of blood which lay as a hideous stain on the otherwise clean yellow-painted floor. The blood must have flowed from a dreadful wound, from a severed artery even, the doctor thought, there was such a quantity of it. It had already dried and darkened, making its terrifying ugliness the more apparent.

"This is the third murder in two years," said the magistrate in a low voice.

"And the most mysterious of all of them," added the clerk.

"Yes, it is," said the doctor. "And there is not a trace of the body, you say?—or a clue as to where they might have taken the dead—or dying man?"

With these words he looked carefully around the room, but there was no more blood to be seen anywhere. Any spot would have been clearly visible on the light-coloured floor. There was nothing else to tell of the horrible crime that had been committed here, nothing but the great, hideous, brown-red spot in the middle of the room.

"Have you made a thorough search for the body?" asked the doctor.

The magistrate shook his head. "No, I have done nothing to speak of yet. We have been waiting for you. There is a gendarme at the gate; no one can go in or out without being seen."

"Very well, then, let us begin our search now."

The magistrate and his companion turned towards the door of the room but the doctor motioned them to come back. "I see you do not know the house as well as I do," he said, and led the way towards a niche in the side of the wall, which was partially filled by a high bookcase.

"Ah—that is the entrance of the passage to the church?" asked the magistrate in surprise.

"Yes, this is it. The door is not locked."

"You mean you believe——"

"That the murderers came in from the church? Why not? It is quite possible."

"To think of such a thing!" exclaimed the notary with a shake of his head.

The doctor laughed bitterly. "To those who are planning a murder, a church is no more than any

other place. There is a bolt here as you see. I will close this bolt now. Then we can leave the room knowing that no one can enter it without being seen."

The simple furniture of the study, a desk, a sofa, a couple of chairs and several bookcases, gave no chance of any hiding place either for the body of the victim or for the murderers. When the men left the room the magistrate locked the door and put the key in his own pocket. The gendarme in the neighbouring apartment was sent down to stand in the courtyard at the entrance to the house. The sexton, a little hunchback, was ordered to remain in the vestry at the other end of the passage from the church to the house.

Then the thorough search of the house began. Every room in both stories, every corner of the attic and the cellar, was looked over thoroughly. The stable, the barns, the garden and even the well underwent a close examination. There was no trace of a body anywhere, not even a trail of blood, nothing which would give the slightest clue as to how the murderers had entered, how they had fled, or what they had done with their victim.

The great gate of the courtyard was closed. The men, reinforced by the farm hands, entered the church, while Liska and the dairy-maids huddled in the servants' dining-room in a trembling group around the old housekeeper. The search in the church as well as in the vestry was equally in vain. There was no trace to be found there any more than in the house.

Meanwhile, during these hours of anxious seeking, the rumour of another terrible crime had spread through the village, and a crowd that grew from minute to minute gathered in front of the closed gates to the rectory, in front of the church, the closed doors of which did not open although it was a high feast day. The utter silence from the steeple, where the

bells hung mute, added to the spreading terror. Finally the doctor came out from the rectory, accompanied by the magistrate, and announced to the waiting villagers that their venerable pastor had disappeared under circumstances which left no doubt that he had met his death at the hand of a murderer. The peasants listened in shuddering silence, the men pale-faced, the women sobbing aloud with frightened children hanging to their skirts. Then at the magistrate's order, the crowd dispersed slowly, going to their homes, while a messenger set off to the near-by county seat.

It was a weird, sad Easter Monday. Even nature seemed to feel the pressure of the brooding horror, for heavy clouds piled up towards noon and a chill wind blew fitfully from the north, bending the young corn and the creaking tree-tops, and moaning about the straw-covered roofs. Then an icy cold rain descended on the village, sending the children, the only humans still unconscious of the fear that had come on them all, into the houses to play quietly in the corner by the hearth.

There was nothing else spoken of wherever two or three met together throughout the village except this dreadful, unexplainable thing that had happened in the rectory. The little village inn was full to overflowing and the hum of voices within was like the noise of an excited beehive. Everyone had some new explanation, some new guess, and it was not until the notary arrived, looking even more important than usual, that silence fell upon the excited throng. But the expectations aroused by his coming were not fulfilled. The notary knew no more than the others, although he had been one of the searchers in the rectory. But he was in no haste to disclose his ignorance, and sat wrapped in a dignified silence until some one found courage to question him.

"Was there nothing stolen?" he was asked.

"No, nothing as far as we can tell yet. But if it was the gypsies—as may be likely—they are content with so little that it would not be noticed."

"Gypsies?" exclaimed one man scornfully. "It doesn't have to be gypsies, we've got enough tramps and vagabonds of our own. Didn't they kill the pedlar for the sake of a bag of tobacco, and old Katiza for a couple of hens?"

"Why do you rake up things that happened twenty years ago?" cried another over the table. "You'd better tell us rather who killed Red Betty, and pulled Janos, the smith's farm hand, down into the swamp?"

"Yes, or who cut the bridge supports, when the brook was in flood, so that two good cows broke through and drowned?"

"Yes, indeed, if we only knew what band of robbers and villains it is that is ravaging our village."

"And they haven't stopped yet, evidently."

"This is the worst misfortune of all! What will our poor do now that they have murdered our good pastor, who cared for us all like a father?"

"He gave all he had to the poor, he kept nothing for himself."

"Yes, indeed, that's how it was. And now we can't even give this good man Christian burial."

"Shepherd Janci knew this morning early that we were going to have a new pastor," whispered the landlord in the notary's ear. The latter looked up astonished. "Who said so?" he asked.

"My boy Ferenz, who went to fetch him about seven o'clock. One of my cows was sick."

Ferenz was sent for and told his story. The men listened with great interest, and the smith, a broad-shouldered elderly man, was particularly eager to hear, as he had always believed in the shepherd's power of second sight. The tailor, who was more



modern-minded, laughed and made his jokes at this. But the smith laid one mighty hand on the other's shoulder, almost crushing the tailor's slight form under its weight, and said gravely: "Friend, do you be silent in this matter. You've come from other parts and you do not know of things that have happened here in days gone by. Janci can do more than take care of his sheep. One day, when my little girl was playing in the street, he said to me, 'Have a care of Maruschka, smith!' and three days later the child was dead. The evening before Red Betty was murdered he saw her in a vision lying in a coffin in front of her door. He told it to the sexton, whom he met in the fields; and next morning they found Betty dead. And there are many more things that I could tell you, but what's the use; when a man won't believe it's only lost talk to try to make him. But one thing you should know: when Janci stares ahead of him without seeing what's in front of him, then the whole village begins to wonder what's going to happen, for Janci knows far more than all the rest of us put together."

The smith's grave, deep voice filled the room and the others listened in a silence that gave assent to his words. He had scarcely finished speaking, however, when there was a noise of galloping hoofs and rapidly rolling wagon wheels. A tall brake drawn by four handsome horses dashed past in a whirlwind.

"It's the Count—the Count and the district judge," said the landlord in a tone of respect. The notary made a grab at his hat and umbrella and hurried from the room. "That shows how much they thought of our pastor," continued the landlord proudly. "For the Count himself has come and with four horses, too, to get here the more quickly. His Reverence was a great friend of the Countess."

"They didn't make so much fuss over the pedlar and Betty," murmured the cobbler, who suffered from a perpetual grouch. But he followed the others, who paid their scores hastily and went out into the streets that they might watch from a distance at least what was going on in the rectory. The landlord bustled about the inn to have everything in readiness in case the gentlemen should honour him by taking a meal, and perhaps even lodgings, at his house. At the gate of the rectory the coachman and the maid Liska stood to receive the newcomers, just as five o'clock was striking from the steeple.

It should have been still quite light, but it was already dusk, for the clouds hung heavy. The rain had ceased, but a heavy wind came up which tore the delicate petals of the blossoms from the fruit trees and strewn them like snow on the ground beneath. The Count, who was the head of one of the richest and most aristocratic families in Hungary, threw off his heavy fur coat and hastened up the stairs at the top of which his old friend and confidant, the venerable pastor, usually came to meet him. To-day it was only the local magistrate who stood there, bowing deeply.

"This is incredible, incredible!" exclaimed the Count.

"It is, indeed, sir," said the man, leading the magnate through the dining-room into the pastor's study, where, as far as could be seen, the murder had been committed. They were joined by the district judge, who had remained behind to give an order sending a carriage to the nearest railway station. The judge, too, was serious and deeply shocked, for he also had greatly admired and revered the old pastor. The stately rectory had been the scene of many a jovial gathering when the lord of the manor had made it a centre for a day's hunting with his friends. The

bearers of some of the proudest names in all Hungary had gathered in the high-arched rooms to laugh with the venerable pastor and to sample the excellent wines in his cellar. These wines, which the gentlemen themselves would send in as presents to the master of the rectory, would be carefully preserved for their own enjoyment. Not a landed proprietor for many leagues around but knew and loved the old pastor, who had now so strangely disappeared under such terrifying circumstances.

"Well, we might as well begin our examination," remarked the Count. "Although if Dr. Orszay's sharp eyes did not find anything, I doubt very much if we will. You have asked the doctor to come here again, haven't you?"

"Yes, your Grace! As soon as I saw you coming I sent the sexton to the asylum." Then the men went in again into the room which had been the scene of the mysterious crime. The wind rattled the open window and blew out its white curtains. It was already dark in the corners of the room, one could see but indistinctly the carvings of the wainscoting. The light backs of the books, or the gold letters on the darker bindings, made spots of brightness in the gloom. The hideous pool of blood in the centre of the floor was still plainly to be seen.

"Judging by the loss of blood, death must have come quickly."

"There was no struggle, evidently, for everything in the room was in perfect order when we entered it."

"There is not even a chair misplaced. His Bible is there on the desk, he may have been preparing for to-day's sermon."

"Yes, that is the case; because see, here are some notes in his handwriting."

The Count and Judge von Kormendy spoke these sentences at intervals as they made their examination

of the room. The local magistrate was able to answer one or two simpler questions, but for the most part he could only shrug his shoulders in helplessness. Nothing had been seen or heard that was at all unusual during the night in the rectory. When the old housekeeper was called up she could say nothing more than this. Indeed, it was almost impossible for the old woman to say anything, her voice choked with sobs at every second word. None of the household force had noticed anything unusual, or could remember anything at all that would throw light on this mystery.

"Well, then, sir, we might just as well sit down and wait for the detective's arrival," said the judge.

"You are waiting for some one besides the doctor?" asked the local magistrate timidly.

"Yes, His Grace telegraphed to Budapest," answered the district judge, looking at his watch. "And if the train is on time, the man we are waiting for ought to be here in an hour. You sent the carriage to the station, didn't you? Is the driver reliable?"

"Yes, sir, he is a dependable man," said the old housekeeper.

Dr. Orszay entered the room just then and the Count introduced him to the district judge, who was still a stranger to him.

"I fear, Count, that our eyes will serve but little in discovering the truth of this mystery," said the doctor.

The nobleman nodded. "I agree with you," he replied. "And I have sent for sharper eyes than either yours or mine."

The doctor looked his question, and the Count continued: "When the news came to me I telegraphed to Pest for a police detective, telling them that the case was peculiar and urgent. I received an answer as I stopped at the station on my way here. This is

it: 'Detective Joseph Muller from Vienna in Budapest by chance. Have sent him to take your case.'"

"Muller?" exclaimed Dr. Orszay. "Can it be the celebrated Muller, the most famous detective of the Austrian police? That would indeed be a blessing."

"I hope and believe that it is," said the Count gravely. "I have heard of this man and we need such a one here that we may find the source of these many misfortunes which have overwhelmed our peaceful village for two years past. It is indeed a stroke of good luck that has led a man of such gifts into our neighbourhood at a time when he is so greatly needed. I believe personally that it is the same person or persons who have been the perpetrators of all these outrages and I intend once for all to put a stop to it, let it cost what it may."

"If any one can discover the truth it will be Muller," said the district judge. "It was I who told the Count how fortunate we were that this man, who is known to the police throughout Austria and far beyond the borders of our kingdom, should have chanced to be in Budapest and free to come to us when we called. You and I"—he turned with a smile to the local magistrate—"you and I can get away with the usual cases of local brutality hereabouts. But the cunning that is at the bottom of these crimes is one too many for us."

The men had taken their places around the great dining-table. The old housekeeper had crept out again, her terror making her forget her usual hospitality. And indeed it would not have occurred to the guests to ask or even to wish for any refreshment. The maid brought a lamp, which sent its weak rays scarcely beyond the edges of the big table. The four men sat in silence for some time.

"I suppose it would be useless to ask who has been

coming and going from the rectory the last few days?" began the Count.

"Oh, yes, indeed, sir," said the district judge with a sigh. "For if this murderer is the same who committed the other crimes he must live here in or near the village, and therefore must be known to all and not likely to excite suspicion."

"I beg your pardon, sir," put in the doctor. "There must be at least two of them. One man alone could not have carried off the farm hand who was killed to the swamp where his body was found. Nor could one man alone have taken away the bloody body of the pastor. Our venerable friend was a man of size and weight, as you know, and one man alone could not have dragged his body from the room without leaving an easily seen trail."

The judge blushed, but he nodded in affirmation to the doctor's words. This thought had not occurred to him before. In fact, the judge was more notable for his good will and his love of justice rather than for his keen intelligence. He was as well aware of this as was any one else, and he was heartily glad that the Count had sent to the capital for reinforcements.

Some time more passed in deep silence. Each of the men was occupied with his own thoughts. A sigh broke the silence now and then, and a slight movement when one or the other drew out his watch or raised his head to look at the door. Finally, the sound of a carriage outside was heard. The men sprang up.

The driver's voice was heard, then steps which ascended the stairs slowly and lightly, audible only because the stillness was so great.

The door opened and a small, slight, smooth-shaven man with a gentle face and keen grey eyes stood on

the threshold. "I am Joseph Muller," he said with a low, soft voice.

The four men in the room looked at him in astonishment.

"This simple-looking individual is the man that every one is afraid of?" thought the Count, as he walked forward and held out his hand to the stranger.

"I sent for you, Mr. Muller," said the magnate, conscious of his stately size and appearance, as well as of his importance in the presence of a personage who so little looked what his great fame might have led one to expect.

"Then you are Count ——?" answered Muller gently. "I was in Budapest, having just finished a difficult case which took me there. They told me that a mysterious crime had happened in your neighbourhood, and sent me here to take charge of it. You will pardon any ignorance I may show as a stranger to this locality. I will do my best and it may be possible that I can help you."

The Count introduced the other gentlemen in order and they sat down again at the table.

"And now what is it you want me for, Count?" asked Muller.

"There was a murder committed in this house," answered the Count.

"When?"

"Last night."

"Who is the victim?"

"Our pastor."

"How was he killed?"

"We do not know."

"You are not a physician, then?" asked Muller, turning to Orszay.

"Yes, I am," answered the latter.

"Well?"

"The body is missing," said Orszay, somewhat sharply.

"Missing?" Muller became greatly interested. "Will you please lead me to the scene of the crime?" he said, rising from his chair.

The others led him into the next room, the magistrate going ahead with a lamp. The judge called for more lights and the group stood around the pool of blood on the floor of the study. Muller's arms were crossed on his breast as he stood looking down at the hideous spot. There was no terror in his eyes, as in those of the others, but only a keen attention and a lively interest.

"Who has been in this room since the discovery?" he asked.

The doctor replied that only the servants of the immediate household, the notary, the magistrate, and himself, then later the Count and the district judge entered the room.

"You are quite certain that no one else has been in here?"

"No, no one else."

"Will you kindly send for the three servants?" The magistrate left the room.

"Who else lives in the house?"

"The sexton and the dairymaid."

"And no one else has left the house to-day or has entered it?"

"No one. The main door has been watched all day by a gendarme."

"Is there but one door out of this room?"

"No, there is a small door beside that bookcase."

"Where does it lead to?"

"It leads to a passageway at the end of which there is a stair down into the vestry."

Muller gave an exclamation of surprise.

"The vestry as well as the church have neither of



them been opened to-day on the side toward the street."

"The church *or* the vestry, you mean," corrected Muller. "How many doors have they on the street side?"

"One each."

"The locks on these doors were in good condition?"

"Yes, they were untouched."

"Was there anything stolen from the church?"

"No, nothing that we could see."

"Was the pastor rich?"

"No, he was almost a poor man, for he gave away all that he had."

"But you were his patron, Count."

"I was his friend. He was the confidential adviser of myself and family."

"This would mean rich presents now and then, would it not?"

"No, that is not the case. Our venerable pastor would take nothing for himself. He would accept no presents but gifts of money for his poor."

"Then you do not believe this to have been a murder for the sake of robbery?"

"No. There was nothing disturbed in any part of the house, no drawers or cupboards broken open at all."

Muller smiled. "I have heard it said that your romantic Hungarian bandits will often be satisfied with the small booty they may find in the pocket or on the person of their victim."

"You are right, Mr. Muller. But that is only when they can find nothing else."

"Or perhaps if it is a case of revenge."

"It cannot be revenge in this case!"

"The pastor was greatly loved?"

"He was loved and revered."

"By every one?"

"By every one!" the four men answered at once.

Muller was still a while. His eyes were veiled and his face thoughtful. Finally he raised his head. "There has been nothing moved or changed in this room?"

"No—neither here nor anywhere else in the house or the church," answered the local magistrate.

"That is good. Now I would like to question the servants."

Muller had already started for the door, then he turned back into the room and pointing toward the second door he asked: "Is that door locked?"

"Yes," answered the Count. "I found it locked when I examined it myself a short time ago."

"It was locked on the inside?"

"Yes, locked on the inside."

"Very well. Then we have nothing more to do here for the time being. Let us go back into the dining-room."

The men returned to the dining-room, Muller last, for he stopped to lock the door of the study and put the key in his pocket. Then he began his examination of the servants.

The old housekeeper, who, as usual, was the first to rise in the household, had also, as usual, rung the bell to waken the other servants. Then when Liska came downstairs she had sent her up to the pastor's room. His bedroom was to the right of the dining-room. Liska had, as usual, knocked on the door exactly at seven o'clock and continued knocking for some few minutes without receiving any answer. Slightly alarmed, the girl had gone back and told the housekeeper that the pastor did not answer.

Then the old woman asked the coachman to go up and see if anything was the matter with the reverend gentleman. The man returned in a few mo-

ments, pale and trembling in every limb and apparently struck dumb by fright. He motioned the women to follow him, and all three crept up the stairs. The coachman led them first to the pastor's bed, which was untouched, and then to the pool of blood in his study. The sight of the latter frightened the servants so much that they did not notice at first that there was no sign of the pastor himself, whom they now knew must have been murdered. When they finally came to themselves sufficiently to take some action, the man hurried off to call the magistrate, and Liska ran to the asylum to fetch the old doctor, the pastor's intimate friend. The aged housekeeper, trembling in fear, crept back to her own room and sat there waiting the return of the others.

This was the story of the early morning as told by the three servants, who had already given their report in much the same words to the Count on his arrival and also to the magistrate. There was no reason to doubt the words of either the old housekeeper or of Janos, the coachman, who had served for more than twenty years in the rectory and whose fidelity was known. The girl Liska was scarcely eighteen, and her round childish face and big eyes dimmed with tears, corroborated her story. When they had told Muller all they knew, the detective sat stroking his chin, and looking thoughtfully at the floor. Then he raised his head and said, in a tone of calm friendliness: "Well, good friends, this will do for to-night. Now, if you will kindly give me a bite to eat and a glass of some light wine, I'd be very thankful. I have had no food since early this morning."

The housekeeper and the maid disappeared, and Janos went to the stable to harness the Count's trap.

The magnate turned to the detective. "I thank you once more that you have come to us. I appre-

ciate it greatly that a stranger to our part of the country, like yourself, should give his time and strength to this problem of our obscure little village."

"There is nothing else calling me, sir," answered Muller. "And the Budapest police will explain to headquarters at Vienna if I do not return at once."

"Do you understand our tongue sufficiently to deal with these people here?"

"Oh, yes; there will be no difficulty about that. I have hunted criminals in Hungary before. And a case of this kind does not usually call for disguises in which any accent would betray one."

"It is a strange profession," said the doctor.

"One gets used to it—like everything else," answered Muller, with a gentle smile. "And now I have to thank you gentlemen for your confidence in me."

"Which I know you will justify," said the Count.

Muller shrugged his shoulders: "I haven't felt anything yet—but it will come—there's something in the air."

The Count smiled at his manner of expressing himself, but all four of the men had already begun to feel sympathy and respect for this quiet-mannered little person whose words were so few and whose voice was so gentle. Something in his grey eyes and in the quiet determination of his manner made them realise that he had won his fame honestly. With the enthusiasm of his race the Hungarian Count pressed the detective's hand in a warm grasp as he said: "I know that we can trust in you. You will avenge the death of my old friend and of those others who were killed here. The doctor and the magistrate will tell you about them to-morrow. We two will go home now. Telegraph us as soon as anything has happened. Every one in the village will be ready to help you and of course you can call on

me for funds. Here is something to begin on." With these words the Count laid a silk purse full of gold pieces on the table. One more pressure of the hand and he was gone. The other men also left the room, following the Count's lead in a cordial farewell of the detective. They also shared the nobleman's feeling that now indeed, with this man to help them, could the cloud of horror that had hung over the village for two years, and had culminated in the present catastrophe, be lifted.

The excitement of the Count's departure had died away and the steps of the other men on their way to the village had faded in the distance. There was nothing now to be heard but the rustling of the leaves and the creaking of the boughs as the trees bent before the onrush of the wind. Muller stood alone, with folded arms, in the middle of the large room, letting his sharp eyes wander about the circle of light thrown by the lamps. He was glad to be alone—for only when he was alone could his brain do its best work. He took up one of the lamps and opened the door to the room in which, as far as could be known, the murder had been committed. He walked in carefully and, setting the lamp on the desk, examined the articles lying about on it. There was nothing of importance to be found there. An open Bible and a sheet of paper with notes for the day's sermon lay on top of the desk. In the drawers, none of which were locked, were official papers, books, manuscripts of former sermons, and a few unimportant personal notes.

The flame of the lamp flickered in the breeze that came from the open window. But Muller did not close the casement. He wanted to leave everything just as he had found it until daylight. When he saw that it was impossible to leave the lamp there he took it up again and left the room.

"What is the use of being impatient?" he said to himself. "If I move about in this poor light I will be sure to ruin some possible clue. For there *must* be some clue left here. It is impossible for even the most practiced criminal not to leave some trace of his presence."

The detective returned to the dining-room, locking the study door carefully behind him. The maid and the coachman returned, bringing in an abundant supper, and Muller sat down to do justice to the many good things on the tray. When the maid returned to take away the dishes she inquired whether she should put the guest chamber in order for the detective. He told her not to go to any trouble for his sake, that he would sleep in the bed in the neighbouring room.

"You going to sleep in *there*?" said the girl, horrified.

"Yes, my child, and I think I will sleep well to-night. I feel very tired." Liska carried the things out, shaking her head in surprise at this thin little man who did not seem to know what it was to be afraid. Half an hour later the rectory was in darkness. Before he retired, Muller had made a careful examination of the pastor's bedroom. Nothing was disturbed anywhere, and it was evident that the priest had not made any preparations for the night, but was still at work at his desk in the study when death overtook him. When he came to this conclusion, the detective went to bed and soon fell asleep.

In his little hut near the asylum gates, shepherd Janci slept as sound as usual. But he was dreaming and he spoke in his sleep. There was no one to hear him, for his faithful Margit was snoring loudly. Snatches of sentences and broken words came from Janci's lips: "The hand—the big hand—I see it—at his throat—the face—the yellow face—it laughs——"

Next morning the children on their way to school crept past the rectory with wide eyes and open mouths. And the grown people spoke in lower tones when their work led them past the handsome old house. It had once been their pride, but now it was a place of horror to them. The old housekeeper had succumbed to her fright and was very ill. Liska went about her work silently, and the farm servants walked more heavily and chattered less than they had before. The hump-backed sexton, who had not been allowed to enter the church and therefore had nothing to do, made an early start for the inn, where he spent most of the day telling what little he knew to the many who made an excuse to follow him there.

The only calm and undisturbed person in the rectory household was Muller. He had made a thorough examination of the entire scene of the murder, but had not found anything at all. Of one thing alone was he certain: the murderer had come through the hidden passageway from the church. There were two reasons to believe this, one of which might possibly not be sufficient, but the other was conclusive.

The heavy armchair before the desk, the chair on which the pastor was presumably sitting when the murderer entered, was half turned around, turned in just such a way as it would have been had the man who was sitting there suddenly sprung up in excitement or surprise. The chair was pushed back a step from the desk and turned towards the entrance to the passageway. Those who had been in the room during the day had reported that they had not touched any one of the articles of furniture, therefore the position of the chair was the same that had been given it by the man who had sat in it, by the murdered pastor himself.

Of course there was always the possibility that some one had moved the chair without realising it.

This clue, therefore, could not be looked upon as an absolutely certain one had it stood alone. But there was other evidence far more important. The great pool of blood was just half-way between the door of the passage and the armchair. It was here, therefore, that the attack had taken place. The pastor could not have turned in this direction in the hope of flight, for there was nothing here to give him shelter, no weapon that he could grasp, not even a cane. He must have turned in this direction to meet and greet the invader who had entered his room in this unusual manner. Turned to meet him as a brave man would, with no other weapon than the sacredness of his calling and his age.

But this had not been enough to protect the venerable priest. The murderer must have made his thrust at once and his victim had sunk down dying on the floor of the room in which he had spent so many hours of quiet study, in which he had brought comfort and given advice to so many anxious hearts; for dying he must have been—it would be impossible for a man to lose so much blood and live.

“The struggle,” thought the detective, “but was there a struggle?” He looked about the room again, but could see nothing that showed disorder anywhere in its immaculate neatness. No, there could have been no struggle. It must have been a quick knife thrust and death at once. “Not a shot?” No, a shot would have been heard by the night watchman walking the streets near the church. The night was quiet, the window open. Some one in the village would have heard the noise of a shot. And it was not likely that the old housekeeper who slept in the room immediately below, slept the light sleep of the aged, would have failed to have heard the firing of a pistol.

Muller took a chair and sat down directly in front



of the pool of blood, looking at it carefully. Suddenly he bowed his head deeper. He had caught sight of a fine thread of the red fluid which had been drawn out for about a foot or two in the direction towards the door to the dining-room. What did that mean? Did it mean that the murderer went out through that door, dragging something after him that made this delicate line? Muller bent down still deeper. The sun shone brightly on the floor, sending its clear rays obliquely through the window. The sharp eyes which now covered every inch of the yellow-painted floor discovered something else. They discovered that this red thread curved slightly and had a continuation in a fine scratch in the paint of the floor. Muller followed up this scratch and it led him over towards the window and then back again in wide curves, then out again under the desk and finally, growing weaker and weaker, it came back to the neighbourhood of the pool of blood, but on the opposite side of it. Muller got down on his hands and knees to follow up the scratch. He did not notice the discomfort of his position, his eyes shone in excitement and a deep flush glowed in his cheeks. Also, he began to whistle softly.

Joseph Muller, the bloodhound of the Austrian police, had found a clue, a clue that soon would bring him to the trail he was seeking. He did not know yet what he could do with his clue. But this much he knew; sooner or later this scratch in the floor would lead him to the murderer. The trail might be long and devious; but he would follow it and at its end would be success. He knew that this scratch had been made *after* the murder was committed; this was proved by the blood that marked its beginning. And it could not have been made by any of those who entered the room during the day because by that time the blood had dried. This strange streak in the floor,

with its weird curves and spirals, could have been made only by the murderer. But how? With what instrument? There was the riddle which must be solved.

And now Muller, making another careful examination of the floor, found something else. It was something that might be utterly unimportant or might be of great value. It was a tiny bit of hardened lacquer which he found on the floor beside one of the legs of the desk. It was rounded out, with sharp edges, and coloured grey with a tiny zigzag of yellow on its surface. Muller lifted it carefully and looked at it keenly. This tiny bit of lacquer had evidently been knocked off from some convex object, but it was impossible to tell at the moment just what sort of an object it might have been. There are so many different things which are customarily covered with lacquer. However, further examination brought him down to a narrower range of subjects. For on the inside of the lacquer he found a shred of reddish wood fibre. It must have been a wooden object, therefore, from which the lacquer came, and the wood had been of reddish tinge.

Muller pondered the matter for a little while longer. Then he placed his discovery carefully in the pastor's emptied tobacco-box, and dropped the box in his own pocket. He closed the window and the door to the dining-room, lit a lamp, and entered the passageway, leading to the vestry. It was a short passageway, scarcely more than a dozen paces long.

The walls were whitewashed, the floor tiled and the entire passage shone in neatness. Muller held the light of his lamp to every inch of it, but there was nothing to show that the criminal had gone through here with the body of his victim.

"The criminal"—Muller still thought of only one. His long experience had taught him that the most

intricate crimes were usually committed by one man only. The strength necessary for such a crime as this did not deceive him either. He knew that in extraordinary moments extraordinary strength will come to the one who needs it.

He now passed down the steps leading into the vestry. There was no trace of any kind here either. The door into the vestry was not locked. It was seldom locked, they had told him, for the vestry itself was closed by a huge carved portal with a heavy ornamented iron lock that could be opened only with the greatest noise and trouble. This door was locked and closed as it had been since yesterday morning. Everything in the vestry was in perfect order; the priest's garments and the censers all in their places. Muller assured himself of this before he left the little room. He then opened the glass door that led down by a few steps into the church.

It was a beautiful old church, and it was a rich church also. It was built in the older Gothic style, and its heavy, broad-arched walls, its massive columns would have made it look cold and bare had not handsome tapestries, the gift of the lady of the manor, covered the walls. Fine old pictures hung here and there above the altars, and handsome stained glass windows broke the light that fell into the high vaulted interior. There were three great altars in the church, all of them richly decorated. The main altar stood isolated in the choir. In the open space behind it was the entrance to the crypt, now veiled in a mysterious twilight. Heavy silver candlesticks, three on a side, stood on the altar. The pale gold of the tabernacle door gleamed between them.

Muller walked through the silent church, in which even his light steps resounded uncannily. He looked into each of the pews, into the confessionals, he walked around all the columns, he climbed up into the

pulpit, he did everything that the others had done before him yesterday. And as with them, he found nothing that would indicate that the murderer had spent any time in the church. Finally he turned back once more to the main altar on his way out. But he did not leave the church as he intended. His last look at the altar had showed him something that attracted his attention and he walked up the three steps to examine it more closely.

What he had seen was something unusual about one of the silver candlesticks. These candlesticks had three feet, and five of them were placed in such a way that the two front feet were turned toward the spectator. But on the end candlestick nearest Muller the single foot projected out to the front of the altar. This candlestick therefore had been set down hastily, not placed carefully in the order of things as were the others.

And not only this. The heavy wax candle which was in the candlestick was burned down about a finger's breadth more than the others, for these were all exactly of a height. Muller bent still nearer to the candlestick, but he saw that the dim light in the church was not sufficient. He went to one of the smaller side altars, took a candle from there, lit it with one of the matches that he found in his own pocket and returned with the burning candle to the main altar. The steps leading up to this altar were covered by a large rug with a white ground and a pattern of flowers. Looking carefully at it the detective saw a tiny brown spot, the mark of a burn, upon one of the white surfaces. Beside it lay a half used match.

Walking around this carefully, Muller approached the candlestick that interested him and holding up his light he examined every inch of its surface. He found what he was looking for. There were dark

red spots between the rough edges of the silver ornamentation.

"Then the body is somewhere around here," thought the detective and came down from the steps, still holding the burning candle.

He walked slowly to the back of the altar. There was a little table there such as held the sacred dishes for the communion service, and the little carpet-covered steps which the sexton put out for the pastor when he took the monstrance from the high-built tabernacle. That was all that was to be seen in the dark corner behind the altar. Holding his candle close to the floor Muller discovered an iron ring fastened to one of the big stone flags. This must be the entrance to the crypt.

Muller tried to raise the flag and was astonished to find how easily it came up. It was a square of reddish marble, the same with which the entire floor of the church was tiled. This flag was very thin and could easily be raised and placed back against the wall. Muller took up his candle, too greatly excited to stop to get a stick for it. He felt assured that now he would soon be able to solve at least a part of the mystery. He climbed down the steps carefully and found that they led into the crypt as he supposed. They were kept spotlessly clean, as was the entire crypt as far as he could see it by the light of his flickering candle. He was not surprised to discover that the air was perfectly pure here. There must be windows or ventilators somewhere, this he knew from the way his candle behaved.

The ancient vault had a high arched ceiling and heavy massive pillars. It was a subterranean repetition of the church above. There had evidently been a convent attached to this church at one time; for here stood a row of simple wooden coffins all exactly alike, bearing each one upon its lid a roughly painted

cross surrounded by a wreath. Thus were buried the monks of days long past.

Muller walked slowly through the rows of coffins looking eagerly to each side. Suddenly he stopped and stood still. His hand did not tremble but his thin face was pale—pale as that face which looked up at him out of one of the coffins. The lid of the coffin stood up against the wall and Muller saw that there were several other empty ones further on, waiting for their silent occupants.

The body in the open coffin before which Muller stood was the body of the man who had been missing since the day previous. He lay there quite peacefully, his hands crossed over his breast, his eyes closed, a line of pain about his lips. In the crossed fingers was a little bunch of dark yellow roses. At the first glance one might almost have thought that loving hands had laid the old pastor in his coffin. But the red stain on the white cloth about his throat, and the bloody disorder of his snow-white hair contrasted sadly with the look of peace on the dead face. Under his head was a white silk cushion, one of the cushions from the altar.

Muller stood looking down for some time at this poor victim of a strange crime, then he turned to go.

He wanted to know one thing more: how the murderer had left the crypt. The flame of his candle told him, for it nearly went out in a gust of wind that came down the opening right above him. This was a window about three or four feet from the floor, protected by rusty iron bars which had been sawed through, leaving the opening free. It was a small window, but it was large enough to allow a man of much greater size than Muller to pass through it. The detective blew out his candle and climbed up onto the window sill. He found himself outside, in a corner of the churchyard. A thicket of heavy bushes

grown up over neglected graves completely hid the opening through which he had come. There were thorns on these bushes and also a few scattered roses, dark yellow roses.

Muller walked thoughtfully through the churchyard. The sexton sat huddled in an unhappy heap at the gate. He looked up in alarm as he saw the detective walking towards him. Something in the stranger's face told the little hunchback that he had made a discovery. The sexton sprang up, his lips did not dare utter the question that his eyes asked.

"I have found him," said the detective gravely.

The hunchback sexton staggered, then recovered himself, and hurried away to fetch the magistrate and the doctor.

An hour later the murdered pastor lay in state in the chief apartment of his home, surrounded by burning candles and high-heaped masses of flowers. But he still lay in the simple convent coffin and the little bunch of roses which his murderer had placed between his stiffening fingers had not been touched.

Two days later the pastor was buried. The Count and his family led the train of numerous mourners and among the last was Muller.

A day or two after the funeral the detective sauntered slowly through the main street of the village. He was not in a very good humour, his answer to the greeting of those who passed him was short. The children avoided him, for with the keenness of their kind they recognised the fact that this usually gentle little man was not in possession of his habitual calm temper. One group of boys, playing with a top, did not notice his coming and Muller stopped behind them to look on. Suddenly a sharp whistle was heard and the boys looked up from their play, surprised at seeing the stranger behind them. His eyes were gleaming,

and his cheeks were flushed, and a few bars of a merry tune came in a keen whistle from his lips as he watched the spirals made by the spinning top.

Before the boys could stop their play the detective had left the group and hastened onward to the little shop. He left it again in eager haste after having made his purchase, and hurried back to the rectory. The shop-keeper stood in the doorway looking in surprise at this grown man who came to buy a top. And at home in the rectory the old housekeeper listened in equal surprise to the humming noise over her head. She thought at first it might be a bee that had got in somehow. Then she realised that it was not quite the same noise, and having already concluded that it was of no use to be surprised at anything this strange guest might do, she continued reading her scriptures.

Upstairs in the pastor's study, Muller sat in the armchair attentively watching the gyrations of a spinning top. The little toy, started at a certain point, drew a line exactly parallel to the scratch on the floor that had excited his thoughts and absorbed them day and night.

"It was a top—a top" repeated the detective to himself again and again. "I don't see why I didn't think of that right away. Why, of course, nothing else could have drawn such a perfect curve around the room, unhindered by the legs of the desk. Only I don't see how a toy like that could have any connection with this cruel and purposeless murder. Why, only a fool—or a madman——"

Muller sprang up from his chair and again a sharp shrill whistle came from his lips. "A madman!—" he repeated, beating his own forehead. "It could only have been a madman who committed this murder! And the pastor was not the first, there were two other murders here within a comparatively short



time. I think I will take advantage of Dr. Orszay's invitation."

Half an hour later Muller and the doctor sat together in a summer-house, from the windows of which one could see the park surrounding the asylum to almost its entire extent. The park was arranged with due regard to its purpose. The eye could sweep through it unhindered. There were no bushes except immediately along the high wall. Otherwise there were beautiful lawns, flower beds and groups of fine old trees with tall trunks.

As would be natural in visiting such a place Muller had induced the doctor to talk about his patients. Dr. Orszay was an excellent talker and possessed the power of painting a personality for his listeners. He was pleased and flattered by the evident interest with which the detective listened to his remarks.

"Then your patients are all quite harmless?" asked Muller thoughtfully, when the doctor came to a pause.

"Yes, all quite harmless. Of course, there is the man who strangely enough considers himself the reincarnation of the famous French murderer, the goldsmith Cardillac, who, as you remember, kept all Paris in a fervour of excitement by his crimes during the reign of Louis XIV. But in spite of his weird mania this man is the most good-natured of any. He has been shut up in his room for several days now. He was a mechanician by trade, living in Budapest, and an unsuccessful invention turned his mind."

"Is he a large, powerful man?" asked Muller.

Dr. Orszay looked a bit surprised. "Why do you ask that? He does happen to be a large man of considerable strength, but in spite of it I have no fear of him. I have an attendant who is invaluable to me, a man of such strength that even the fiercest of them cannot overcome him, and yet with a mind and

a personal magnetism which they cannot resist. He can always master our patients mentally and physically—most of them are afraid of him and they know that they must do as he says. There is something in his very glance which has the power to paralyse even healthy nerves, for it shows the strength of will possessed by this man.”

“And what is the name of this invaluable attendant?” asked Muller with a strange smile which the doctor took to be slightly ironical.

“Gyuri Kovacz. You are amused at my enthusiasm? But consider my position here. I am an old man and have never been a strong man. At my age I would not have strength enough to force that little woman there—she thinks herself possessed and is quite cranky at times—to go to her own room when she doesn’t want to. And do you see that man over there in the blue blouse? He is an excellent gardener but he believes himself to be Napoleon, and when he has his acute attacks I would be helpless to control him were it not for Gyuri.”

“And you are not afraid of Cardillac?” interrupted Muller.

“Not in the least. He is as good-natured as a child and as confiding. I can let him walk around here as much as he likes. If it were not for the absurd nonsense that he talks when he has one of his attacks, and which frightens those who do not understand him, I could let him go free altogether.”

“Then you never let him leave the asylum grounds?”

“Oh, yes. I take him out with me very frequently. He is a man of considerable education and a very clever talker. It is quite a pleasure to be with him. That was the opinion of my poor friend also, my poor murdered friend.”

"The pastor?"

"The pastor. He often invited Cardillac to come to the rectory with me."

"Indeed. Then Cardillac knew the inside of the rectory?"

"Yes. The pastor used to lend him books and let him choose them himself from the library shelves. The people in the village are very kind to my poor patients here. I have long since had the habit of taking some of the quieter ones with me down into the village and letting the people become acquainted with them. It is good for both parties. It gives the patients some little diversion, and it takes away the worst of the senseless fear these peasants had at first of the asylum and its inmates. Cardillac in particular is always welcome when he comes, for he brings the children all sorts of toys that he makes in his cell."

The detective had listened attentively and once his eyes flashed and his lips shut tight as if to keep in the betraying whistle. Then he asked calmly: "But the patients are only allowed to go out when you accompany them, I suppose?"

"Oh, no; the attendants take them out sometimes. I prefer, however, to let them go only with Gyuri, for I can depend upon him more than upon any of the others."

"Then he and Cardillac have been out together occasionally?"

"Oh, yes, quite frequently. But—pardon me—this is almost like a cross-examination."

"I beg your pardon, doctor, it's a bad habit of mine. One gets so accustomed to it in my profession."

"What is it you want?" asked Doctor Orszay, turning to a fine-looking young man of superb build, who entered just then and stood by the door.

"I just wanted to announce, sir, that No. 302 is quiet again!

"302 is Cardillac himself, Mr. Muller, or to give him his right name, Lajos Varna," explained the doctor turning to his guest. "He is the 302nd patient who has been received here in these twenty years.—Then Cardillac is quiet again?" he asked, looking up at the young giant. "I am glad of that. You can announce our visit to him. This gentleman wants to inspect the asylum."

Muller realised that this was the attendant Gyuri, and he looked at him attentively. He was soon clear in his own mind that this remarkably handsome man did not please him, in fact awoke in him a feeling of repulsion. The attendant's quiet, almost cat-like movements were in strange contrast to the massivity of his superb frame, and his large round eyes, shaped for open, honest glances, were shifty and cunning. They seemed to be asking "Are you trying to discover anything about me?" coupled with a threat "For your own sake you had better not do it."

When the young man had left the room Muller rose hastily and walked up and down several times. His face was flushed and his lips tight set. Suddenly he exclaimed: "I do not like this Gyuri."

Dr. Orszay looked up astonished. "There are many others who do not like him—most of his fellow-warders for instance, and all of the patients. I think there must be something in the contrast of such quiet movements with such a big body that gets on people's nerves. But consider, Mr. Muller, that the man's work would naturally make him a little different from other people. I have known Gyuri for five years as a faithful and unassuming servant, always willing and ready for any duty, however difficult or dangerous. He has but one fault—if I may call it such—that is that he has a mistress who is known to be mer-

cenary and hard-hearted. She lives in a neighbouring village."

"For five years, you say? And how long has Cardillac been here?"

"Cardillac? He has been here for almost three years."

"For almost three years, and is it not almost three years—" Muller interrupted himself. "Are we quite alone? Is no one listening?" The doctor nodded, greatly surprised, and the detective continued almost in a whisper, "and it is just about three years now that there have been committed, at intervals, three terrible crimes notable from the cleverness with which they were carried out, and from the utter impossibility, apparently, of discovering the perpetrator."

Orszay sprang up. His face flushed and then grew livid, and he put his hand to his forehead. Then he forced a smile and said in a voice that trembled in spite of himself: "Mr. Muller, your imagination is wonderful. And which of these two do you think it is that has committed these crimes—the perpetrator of which you have come here to find?"

"I will tell you that later. I must speak to No. 302 first, and I must speak to him in the presence of yourself and Gyuri."

The detective's deep gravity was contagious. Dr. Orszay had sufficiently controlled himself to remember what he had heard in former days, and just now recently from the district judge about this man's marvellous deeds. He realised that when Muller said a thing, no matter how extravagant it might sound, it was worth taking seriously. This realisation brought great uneasiness and grief to the doctor's heart, for he had grown fond of both of the men on whom terrible suspicion was cast by such an authority.

Muller himself was uneasy, but the gloom that had

hung over him for the past day or two had vanished. The impenetrable darkness that had surrounded the mystery of the pastor's murder had gotten on his nerves. He was not accustomed to work so long over a problem without getting some light on it. But now, since the chance watching of the spinning top in the street had given him his first inkling of the trail, he was following it up to a clear issue. The eagerness, the blissful vibrating of every nerve that he always felt at this stage of the game, was on him again. He knew that from now on what was still to be done would be easy. Hitherto his mind had been made up on one point; that one man alone was concerned in the crime. Now he understood the possibility that there might have been two, the harmless mechanic who fancied himself a dangerous murderer, and the handsome young giant with the evil eyes.

The two men stood looking at each other in a silence that was almost hostile. Had this stranger come to disturb the peace of the refuge for the unfortunate and to prove that Dr. Orszay, the friend of all the village, had unwittingly been giving shelter to such criminals?

"Shall we go now?" asked the detective finally.

"If you wish it, sir," answered the doctor in a tone that was decidedly cool.

Muller held out his hand. "Don't let us be foolish, doctor. If you should find yourself terribly deceived, and I should have been the means of proving it, promise me that you will not be angry with me."

Orszay pressed the offered hand with a deep sigh. He realised the other's position and knew it was his duty to give him every possible assistance. "What is there for me to do now?" he asked sadly.

"You must see that all the patients are shut up in their cells so that the other attendants are at our

disposal if we need them. Varna's room has barred windows, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"And I suppose also that it has but one door. I believe you told me that your asylum was built on the cell system."

"Yes, there is but one door to the room."

"Let the four other attendants stand outside this door. Gyuri will be inside with us. Tell the men outside that they are to seize and hold whomever I shall designate to them. I will call them in by a whistle. You can trust your people?"

"Yes, I think I can."

"Well, I have my revolver," said Muller calmly, "and now we can go."

They left the room together, and found Gyuri waiting for them a little further along the corridor. "Aren't you well, sir?" the attendant asked the doctor, with an anxious note in his voice.

The man's anxiety was not feigned. He was really a faithful servant in his devotion to the old doctor, although Muller had not misjudged him when he decided that this young giant was capable of anything. Good and evil often lie so close together in the human heart.

The doctor's emotion prevented him from speaking, and the detective answered in his place. "It is a sudden indisposition," he said. "Lead me to No. 302, who is waiting for us, I suppose. The doctor wants to lie down a moment in his own room."

Gyuri glanced distrustfully at this man whom he had met for the first time to-day, but who was no stranger to him—for he had already learned the identity of the guest in the rectory. Then he turned his eyes on his master. The latter nodded and said: "Take the gentleman to Varna's room. I will follow shortly."

The cell to which they went was the first one at the head of the staircase. "Extremely convenient," thought Muller to himself. It was a large room, comfortably furnished and filled now with the red glow of the setting sun. A turning-lathe stood by the window and an elderly man was at work at it. Gyuri called to him and he turned and rose when he saw a stranger.

Lajos Varna was a tall, loose-jointed man with sal-low skin and tired eyes. He gave only a hasty glance at his visitor, then looked at Gyuri. The expression in his eyes as he turned them on those of the warder was like the look in the eyes of a well-trained dog when it watches its master's face. Gyuri's brows were drawn close together and his mouth set tight to a narrow line. His eyes fairly bored themselves into the patient's eyes with an expression like that of a hypnotiser.

Muller knew now what he wanted to know. This young man understood how to bend the will of others, even the will of a sick mind, to his own desires. The little silent scene he had watched had lasted just the length of time it had taken the detective to walk through the room and hold out his hand to the patient.

"I don't want to disturb you, Mr. Varna," he said in a friendly tone, with a motion towards the bench from which the mechanician had just arisen. Varna sat down again, obedient as a child. He was not always so apparently, for Muller saw a red mark over the fingers of one hand that was evidently the mark of a blow. Gyuri was not very choice in the methods by which he controlled the patients confided to his care.

"May I sit down also?" asked Muller.

Varna pushed forward a chair. His movements were like those of an automaton.



"And now tell me how you like it here?" began the detective. Varna answered with a low soft voice, "Oh, I like it very much, sir." As he spoke he looked up at Gyuri, whose eyes still bore their commanding expression.

"They treat you kindly here?"

"Oh, yes."

"The doctor is very good to you?"

"Ah, the doctor is so good!" Varna's dull eyes brightened.

"And the others are good to you also?"

"Oh, yes."—The momentary gleam in the sad eyes had vanished again.

"Where did you get this red scar?"

The patient became uneasy, he moved anxiously on his chair and looked up at Gyuri. It was evident that he realised there would be more red marks if he told the truth to this stranger.

Muller did not insist upon an answer. "You are uneasy and nervous sometimes, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir, I have been—nervous—lately."

"And they don't let you go out at such times?"

"Why, I—no, I may not go out at such times."

"But the doctor takes you with him sometimes—the doctor or Gyuri?" asked the detective.

"Yes."

"I haven't had him out with me for weeks," interrupted the attendant. He seemed particularly anxious to have the "for weeks" clearly heard by this inconvenient questioner.

Muller dropped this subject and took up another. "They tell me you are very fond of children, and I can see that you are making toys for them here."

"Yes, I love children, and I am so glad they are not afraid of me." These words were spoken with more warmth and greater interest than anything the man had yet said.

"And they tell me that you take gifts with you for the children every time you go down to the village. This is pretty work here, and it must be a pleasant diversion for you." Muller had taken up a dainty little spinning-wheel which was almost completed. "Isn't it made from the wood of a red yew tree?"

"Yes, the doctor gave me a whole tree that had been cut down in the park."

"And that gave you wood for a long time?"

"Yes, indeed; I have been making toys from it for months." Varna had become quite eager and interested as he handed his visitor a number of pretty trifles. The two had risen from their chairs and were leaning over the wide window seat which served as a store-house for the wares turned out by the busy workman. They were toys, mostly, all sorts of little pots and plates, dolls' furniture, balls of various sizes, miniature bowling pins, and tops. Muller took up one of the latter.

"How very clever you are, and how industrious," he exclaimed, sitting down again and turning the top in his hands. It was covered with gray varnish with tiny little yellow stripes painted on it. Towards the lower point a little bit of the varnish had been broken off and the reddish wood underneath was visible. The top was much better constructed than the cheap toys sold in the village. It was hollow and contained in its interior a mechanism started by a pressure on the upper end. Once set in motion the little top spun about the room for some time.

"Oh, isn't that pretty! Is this mechanism your own invention?" asked Muller smiling. Gyuri watched the top with drawn brows and murmured something about "childish foolishness."

"Yes, it is my own invention," said the patient, flattered. He started out on an absolutely technical

explanation of the mechanism of tops in general and of his own in particular, an explanation so lucid and so well put that no one would have believed the man who was speaking was not in possession of the full powers of his mind.

Muller listened very attentively with unfeigned interest.

"But you have made more important inventions than this, haven't you?" he asked when the other stopped talking. Varna's eyes flashed and his voice dropped to a tone of mystery as he answered: "Yes indeed I have. But I did not have time to finish them. For I had become some one else."

"Some one else?"

"Cardillac," whispered Varna, whose mania was now getting the best of him again.

"Cardillac? You mean the notorious goldsmith who lived in Paris 200 years ago? Why, he's dead."

Varna's pale lips curled in a superior smile. "Oh, yes—that's what people think, but it's a mistake. He is still alive—I am—I have—although of course there isn't much opportunity here——"

Gyuri cleared his throat with a rasping noise.

"What were you saying, friend Cardillac?" asked Muller with a great show of interest.

"I have done things here that nobody has found out. It gives me great pleasure to see the authorities so helpless over the riddles I have given them to solve. Oh, indeed, sir, you would never imagine how stupid they are here."

"In other words, friend Cardillac, you are too clever for the authorities here?"

"Yes, that's it," said the insane man greatly flattered. He raised his head proudly and smiled down at his guest. At this moment the doctor came into the room and Gyuri walked forward to the group at the window.

"You are making him nervous, sir" he said to Muller in a tone that was almost harsh.

"You can leave that to me," answered the detective calmly. "And you will please place yourself behind Mr. Varna's chair, not behind mine. It is your eyes that are making him uneasy."

The attendant was alarmed and lost control of himself for a moment. "Sir!" he exclaimed in an outburst.

"My name is Muller, in case you do not know it already, Joseph Muller, detective. Gyuri Kovacz, you will do what I tell you to! I am master here just now. Is it not so, doctor?"

"Yes, it is so," said the doctor.

"What does this mean?" murmured Gyuri, turning pale.

"It means that the best thing for you to do is to stand up against that wall and fold your arms on your breast," said Muller firmly. He took a revolver from his pocket and laid it beside him on the turning-lathe. The young giant, cowed by the sight of the weapon, obeyed the commands of this little man whom he could have easily crushed with a single blow.

Dr. Orszay sank down on the chair beside the door. Muller, now completely master of the situation, turned to the insane man who stood looking at him in a surprise which was mingled with admiration.

"And now, my dear Cardillac, you must tell us of your great deeds here," said the detective in a friendly tone.

The unfortunate man bent over him with shining eyes and whispered: "But you'll shoot him first, won't you?"

"Why should I shoot him?"

"Because he won't let me say a word without beating me. He is so cruel. He sticks pins into me if I don't do what he wants."

"Why didn't you tell the doctor?"

"Gyuri would have treated me worse than ever then. I am a coward, sir, I'm so afraid of pain—and he knew that—he knew that I was afraid of being hurt and that I'd always do what he asked of me. And because I don't like to be hurt myself I always finished them off quickly."

"Finished who?"

"Why, there was Red Betty, he wanted her money."

"Who wanted it?"

"Gyuri."

The man at the wall moved when he heard this terrible accusation. But the detective took up his revolver again. "Be quiet there!" he called, with a look such as he might have thrown at an angry dog. Gyuri stood quiet again but his eyes shot flames and great drops stood out on his forehead.

"Now go on, friend Cardillac," continued the detective. "We were talking about Red Betty."

"I strangled her. She did not even know she was dying. She was such a weak old woman, it really couldn't have hurt her."

"No, certainly not," said Muller soothingly, for he saw that the thought that his victim might have suffered was beginning to make the madman uneasy. "You needn't worry about that. Old Betty died a quiet death. But tell me, how did Gyuri know that she had money?"

"The whole village knew it. She laid cards for people and earned a lot of money that way. She was very stingy and saved every bit. Somebody saw her counting out her money once, she had it in a big stocking under her bed. People in the village talked about it. That's how Gyuri heard of it."

"And so he commanded you to kill Betty and steal her money?"

"Yes. He knew that I loved to give them riddles to guess, just as I did in Paris so long ago."

"Oh, yes, you're Cardillac, aren't you? And now tell us about the smith's swineherd."

"You mean Janos? Oh, he was a stupid lout," answered Varna scornfully.

"Why?"

"He had cast an eye on the beautiful Julcsi, Gyuri's mistress, so of course I had to kill him."

"Did you do that alone?"

"No, Gyuri helped me."

"Why did you cut the bridge supports?"

"Because I enjoy giving people riddles, as I told you. But Gyuri forbade me to kill people uselessly. I liked the chance of getting out though. The doctor's so good to me and the others too. Gyuri is good to me when I have done what he wanted. But you see, Mr. Muller, I am like a prisoner here and that makes me angry. I made Gyuri let me out nights sometimes."

"You mean he let you out alone, all alone?"

"Yes, of course, for I threatened to tell the doctor everything if he didn't."

"You wouldn't have dared do that."

"No, that's true," smiled Varna slyly. "But Gyuri was afraid I might do it, for he isn't always strong enough to frighten me with his eyes. Those were the hours when I could make him afraid—I liked those hours——"

"What did you do when you were out alone at night?"

"I just walked about. I set fire to a tree in the woods once, then the rain came and put it out. Once I killed a dog and another time I cut through the bridge supports. That took me several hours to do and made me very tired. But it was such fun to

know that people would be worrying and fussing about who did it."

Varna rubbed his hands gleefully. He did not look the least bit malicious but only very much amused. The doctor groaned. Gyuri's great body trembled, his arms shook, but he did not make a single voluntary movement. He saw the revolver in Muller's hand and felt the keen grey eyes resting on him in pitiless calm.

"And now tell us about the pastor?" said the detective in a firm clear voice.

"Oh, he was a dear, good gentleman," said No. 302 with an expression of pitying sorrow on his face. "I owed him much gratitude; that's why I put the roses in his hand."

"Yes, but you murdered him first."

"Of course, Gyuri told me to."

"And why?"

"He hated the pastor, for the old gentleman had no confidence in him."

"Is this true?" Muller turned to the doctor.

"I did not notice it," said Orszay with a voice that showed deep sorrow.

"And you?" Muller's eyes bored themselves into the orbs of the young giant, now dulled with fear.

Gyuri started and shivered. "He looked at me sharply every now and then," he murmured.

"And that was why he was killed?"

The warder's head sank on his breast.

"No, not only for that reason," continued No. 302. "Gyuri needed money again. He ordered me to bring him the silver candlesticks off the altar."

"Murder and sacrilege," said the detective calmly.

"No, I did not rob the church. When I had buried the reverend gentleman I heard the cock crowing. I was afraid I might get home here too late and I forgot the candlesticks. I had to stop to wash my

hands in the brook. While I was there I saw shepherd Janci coming along and I hid behind the willows. He almost discovered me once, but Janci's a dreamer, he sees things nobody else sees—and he doesn't see things that everybody else does see. I couldn't help laughing at his sleepy face. But I didn't laugh when I came back to the asylum. Gyuri was waiting for me at the door. When he saw that I hadn't brought the candlesticks he beat me and tortured me worse than he'd ever done before."

"And you didn't tell anyone?"

"Why, no; because I was afraid that if I told on him, I'd never be able to go out again."

"And you, quite alone, could carry the pastor's body out of his room?"

"I am very strong."

"How did you arrange it that there should be no traces of blood to betray you?"

"I waited until the body had stiffened, then I tied up the wound and carried him down into the crypt."

"Why did you do that?"

"I didn't want to leave him in that horrid pool of blood."

"You were sorry for him then?"

"Why, yes; it looked so horrid to see him lying there—and he had always been so good to me. He was so good to me that very evening when I entered his study."

"He recognised you?"

"Certainly. He sprang up from his chair when I came in through the passage from the church. I saw that he was startled, but he smiled at me and reached out his hand to me and said: 'What brings you here, my dear Cardillac?' And then I struck. I wanted him to die with that smile on his lips. It is beautiful to see a man die smiling, it shows that he has not been afraid of death. He was dead at



once. I always kill that way—I know just how to strike and where. I killed more than a hundred people years ago in Paris, and I didn't leave one of them the time for even a sigh. I was renowned for that—I had a kind heart and a sure hand."

Muller interrupted the dreadful imaginings of the madman with a question. "You got into the house through the crypt?"

"Yes, through the crypt. I found the window one night when I was prowling around in the churchyard. When I knew that the pastor was to be the next, I cut through the window bars. Gyuri went into the church one day when nobody was there and found out that it was easy to lift the stone over the entrance to the crypt. He also learned that the doors from the church to the vestry were never locked. I knew how to find the passageway, because I had been through it several times on my visits to the rectory. But it was a mere chance that the door into the pastor's study was unlocked."

"A chance that cost the life of a worthy man," said the detective gravely.

Varna nodded sadly. "But he didn't suffer, he was dead at once."

"And now tell me what this top was doing there?"

No. 302 looked at the detective in great surprise, and then laid his hand on the latter's arm. "How did you know that I had the top there?" he asked with a show of interest.

"I found its traces in the room, and it was those traces that led me here to you," answered Muller.

"How strange!" remarked Varna. "Are you like shepherd Janci that you can see the things others don't see?"

"No, I have not Janci's gift. It would be a great comfort to me and a help to the others perhaps if I had. I can only see things after they have happened."

"But you can see more than others—the others did not see the traces of the top?"

"My business is to see more than others see," said Muller. "But you have not told me yet what the top was doing there. Why did you take a toy like that with you when you went out on such an errand?"

"It was in my pocket by chance. When I reached for my handkerchief to quench the flow of blood the top came out with it. I must have touched the spring without knowing it, for the top began to spin. I stood still and watched it, then I ran after it. It spun around the room and finally came back to the body. So did I. The pastor was quite still and dead by that time."

"You have heard everything, Dr. Orszay?" asked the detective, rising from his chair.

"Yes, I have heard everything," answered the venerable head of the asylum. He was utterly crushed by the realisation that all this tragedy and horror had gone out from his house.

Varna rose also. He understood perfectly that now Gyuri's power was at an end and he was as pleased as a child that has just received a present. "And now you're going to shoot him?" he asked, in the tone a boy would use if asking when the fireworks were to begin.

Muller shook his head. "No, my dear Cardillac," he replied gravely. "He will not be shot—that is a death for a brave soldier—but this man has deserved——" He did not finish the sentence, for the warder sank to the floor unconscious.

"What a coward!" murmured the detective scornfully, looking down at the giant frame that lay prostrate before him. Even in his wide experience he had known of no case of a man of such strength and such bestial cruelty, combined with such utter cowardice.

Varna also stood looking down at the unconscious warder. Then he glanced up with a cunning smile at the other two men who stood there. The doctor, pale and trembling with horror, covered his face with his hands. Muller turned to the door to call in the attendants waiting outside. During the moment's pause that ensued the madman bent over his work-table, seized a knife that lay there and dropped on one knee beside the prostrate form. His hand was raised to strike when a calm voice said: "Fie! Cardillac, for shame! Do not belittle yourself. This man here is not worthy of your knife, the hangman will look after him."

Varna raised his loose-jointed frame and looked about with glistening eyes and trembling lips. His mind was completely darkened once more. "I must kill him—I must have his blood—there is no one to see me," he murmured. "I am a hangman too—he has made a hangman of me," and again he bent with uplifted hand over the man who had utilised his terrible misfortune to make a criminal of him. But two of the waiting attendants seized his arms and threw him back on the floor, while the other two carried Gyuri out. Both unfortunates were soon securely guarded.

"Do not be angry with me, doctor," said Muller gravely, as he walked through the garden accompanied by Orszay.

Doctor Orszay laughed bitterly. "Why should I be angry with you—you who have discovered my inexcusable credulity?"

"Inexcusable? Oh, no, doctor; it was quite natural that you should have believed a man who had himself so well in hand, and who knew so well how to play his part. When we come to think of it, we realise that most crimes have been made possible through some one's credulity, or over-confidence, a credulity

which, in the light of subsequent events, seems quite incomprehensible. Do not reproach yourself and do not lose heart. Your only fault was that you did not recognise the heart of the beast of prey in this admirable human form."

"What course will the law take?" asked Orszay. "The poor unfortunate madman—whose knife took all these lives—cannot be held responsible, can he?"

"Oh, no; his misfortune protects him. But as for the other, though his hands bear no actual bloodstains, he is more truly a murderer than the unhappy man who was his tool. Hanging is too good for him. There are times when even I could wish that we were back in the Middle Ages, when it was possible to torture a prisoner."

"You do not look like that sort of a man," smiled the doctor through his sadness.

"No, I am the most good-natured of men usually, I think—the meekest anyway," answered Muller. "But a case like this——. However, as I said before, keep a stout heart, doctor, and do not waste time in unnecessary self-reproachings." The detective pressed the doctor's hand warmly and walked down the hill towards the village.

He went at once to the office of the magistrate and made his report, then returned to the rectory and packed his grip. He arranged for its transport to the railway station, as he himself preferred to walk the inconsiderable distance. He passed through the village and had just entered the open fields when he met Janci with his flock. The shepherd hastened his steps when he saw the detective approaching.

"You have found him, sir?" he exclaimed as he came up to Muller. The men had come to be friends by this time. The silent shepherd with the power of second sight had won Muller's interest at once.

"Yes, I found him. It is Gyuri, the warder in the asylum."

"No, sir, it is not Gyuri—Gyuri did not do it."

"But when I tell you that he did?"

"But I tell you, sir, that Gyuri did not do it. The man who did it—he has yellowish hands—I saw them—I saw big yellowish hands. Gyuri's hands are big, but they are brown."

"Janci, you are right. I was only trying to test you. Gyuri did not do it; that is, he did not do it with his own hands. The man who held the knife that struck down the pastor was Varna, the crazy mechanician."

Janci beat his forehead. "Oh, I am a foolish and useless dreamer!" he exclaimed; "of course it was Varna's hands that I saw. I have seen them a hundred times when he came down into the village, and yet when I saw them in the vision I did not recognise them."

"We're all dreamers, Janci—and our dreams are very useless generally."

"Yours are not useless, sir," said the shepherd. "If I had as much brains as you have, my dreams might be of some good."

Muller smiled. "And if I had your visions, Janci, it would be a powerful aid to me in my profession."

"I don't think you need them, sir. You can find out the hidden things without them. You are going to leave us?"

"Yes, Janci, I must go back to Budapest, and from there to Vienna. They need me on another case."

"It's a sad work, this bringing people to the gallows, isn't it?"

"Yes, Janci, it is sometimes. But it's a good thing to be able to avenge crime and bring justice to the injured. Good-bye, Janci."

"Good-bye, sir, and God speed you."

The shepherd stood looking after the small, slight figure of the man who walked on rapidly through the heather. "He's the right one for the work," murmured Janci as he turned slowly back towards the village.

An hour later Muller stood in the little waiting-room of the railway station writing a telegram. It was addressed to Count —.

"Do you know the shepherd Janci? It would be a good thing to make him the official detective for the village. He has high qualifications for the profession. If I had his gifts combined with my own, not one could escape me. I have found this one, however. The guards are already taking him to you. My work here is done. If I should be needed again I can be found at Police Headquarters, Vienna.

"Respectfully,  
"JOSEPH MULLER."

While the detective was writing his message—it was one of the rare moments of humour that Muller allowed himself, and he wondered mildly what the stately Hungarian nobleman would think of it—a heavy farm wagon jolted over the country roads towards the little county seat. Sitting beside the driver and riding about the wagon were armed peasants. The figure of a man, securely bound, his face distorted by rage and fear, lay in the wagon. It was Gyuri Kovacz, who had murdered by the hands of another, and who was now on his way to meet the death that was his due.

And at one of the barred windows in the big yellow house stood a sallow-faced man, looking out at the rising moon with sad, tired eyes. His lips were parted in a smile like that of a dreaming child, and he hummed a gentle lullaby.

In his compartment of the express from Budapest to Vienna, Joseph Muller sat thinking over the strange events that had called him to the obscure little Hun-

garian village. He had met with many strange cases in his long career, but this particular case had some features which were unique. Muller's lips set hard and his hands tightened to fists as he murmured: "I've met with criminals who used strange tools, but never before have I met with one who had the cunning and the incredible cruelty to utilise the mania of an unhinged human mind. It is a thousand times worse than those criminals who, now and then throughout the ages, have trained brute beasts to murder for them. Truly, this Hungarian peasant, Gyuri Kovacz, deserves a high place in the infamous roll-call of the great criminals of history. A student of crime might almost be led to think that it is a pity his career has been cut short so soon. He might have gone far.

"But for humanity's sake" (Muller's eyes gleamed), "I am thankful that I was able to discover this beast in human form and render him innocuous; he had done quite enough."

## THE CASE OF THE GOLDEN BULLET





## THE CASE OF THE GOLDEN BULLET

"PLEASE, sir, there is a man outside who asks to see you."

"What does he want?" asked Commissioner Horn, looking up.

"He says he has something to report, sir."

"Send him in, then."

The attendant disappeared, and the commissioner looked up at the clock. It was just striking eleven, but the fellow official who was to relieve him at that hour had not yet appeared. And if this should chance to be a new case, he would probably be obliged to take it himself. The commissioner was not in a very good humour as he sat back to receive the young man who entered the room in the wake of the attendant. The stranger was a sturdy youth, with an unintelligent, good-natured face. He twisted his soft hat in his hands in evident embarrassment, and his eyes wandered helplessly about the great bare room.

"Who are you?" demanded the commissioner.

"My name is Dummel, sir, Johann Dummel."

"And your occupation?"

"My occupation? Oh, yes, I—I am a valet, valet to Professor Fellner."

The commissioner sat up and looked interested. He knew Fellner personally and liked him. "What have you to report to me?" he asked eagerly.

"I—I don't know whether I ought to have come here, but at home——"

"Well, is anything the matter?" insisted Horn.

"Why, sir, I don't know; but the Professor—he is so still—he doesn't answer."

Horn sprang from his chair. "Is he ill?" he asked.

"I don't know, sir. His room is locked—he never locked it before."

"And you are certain he is at home?"

"Yes, sir. I saw him during the night—and the key is in the lock on the inside."

The commissioner had his hat in his hand when the colleague who was to relieve him appeared. "Good and cold out to-day!" was the latter's greeting. Horn answered with an ironical: "Then I suppose you'll be glad if I relieve you of this case. But I assure you I wouldn't do it if it wasn't Fellner. Good-bye. Oh, and one thing more. Please send a physician at once to Fellner's house, No. 7 Field Street."

Horn opened the door and passed on into the adjoining room, accompanied by Johann. The commissioner halted a moment as his eyes fell upon a little man who sat in the corner reading a newspaper. "Hello, Muller; you there? Suppose I take you with me? You aren't doing anything now, are you?"

"No, sir."

"Well, come with me, then. If this should turn out to be anything serious, we may need you."

The three men entered one of the cabs waiting outside the police station. As they rattled through the streets, Commissioner Horn continued his examination of the valet. "When did you see your master last?"

"About eleven o'clock last evening."

"Did you speak with him then?"

"No, I looked through the keyhole."

"Oh, indeed; is that a habit of yours?"

Dummel blushed deeply, but his eyes flashed, and he looked angry.

"No, it is not, sir," he growled. "I only did it this time because I was anxious about the master."

He's been so worked up and nervous the last few days. Last night I went to the theatre, as I always do Saturday evenings. When I returned, about half-past ten it was, I knocked at the door of his bedroom. He didn't answer, and I walked away softly, so as not to disturb him in case he'd gone to sleep already. The hall was dark, and as I went through it I saw a ray of light coming from the keyhole of the Professor's study. That surprised me, because he never worked as late as that before. I thought it over a moment, then I crept up and looked through the keyhole."

"And what did you see?"

"He sat at his desk, quite quiet. So I felt easy again, and went off to bed."

"Why didn't you go into the room?"

"I didn't dare, sir. The Professor never wanted to be disturbed when he was writing."

"Well, and this morning?"

"I got up at the usual time this morning, set the breakfast table, and then knocked at the Professor's bedroom door to waken him. He didn't answer, and I thought he might want to sleep, seeing as it was Sunday, and he was up late last night. So I waited until ten o'clock. Then I knocked again and tried the door, but it was locked. That made me uneasy, because he never locked his bedroom door before. I banged at the door and called out, but there wasn't a sound. Then I ran to the police station."

Horn was evidently as alarmed as was the young valet. But Muller's cheeks were flushed and a flash of secret joy, of pleasurable expectation, brightened his deep-set, grey eyes. He sat quite motionless, but every nerve in his body was alive and tingling. The humble-looking little man had become quite another and a decidedly interesting person. He laid his thin, nervous hand on the carriage door.

"We are not there yet," said the commissioner.

"No, but it's the third house from here," replied Muller.

"You know where everybody lives, don't you?" smiled Horn.

"Nearly everybody," answered Muller gently, as the cab stopped before an attractive little villa surrounded by its own garden, as were most of the houses in this quiet, aristocratic part of the town.

The house was two stories high, but the upper windows were closed and tightly curtained. This upper story was the apartment occupied by the owner of the house, who was now in Italy with his invalid wife. Otherwise the dainty little villa, built in the fashionable Nuremberg style, with heavy wooden doors and lozenge-paned windows, had no occupants except Professor Fellner and his servant. With its graceful outlines and well-planned garden, the dwelling had a most attractive appearance. Opposite it was the broad avenue known as the Promenade, and beyond this were open fields. To the right and to the left were similar villas in their gardens.

Dummel opened the door and the three men entered the house. The commissioner and the valet went in first, Muller following them more slowly. His sharp eyes glanced quickly over the coloured tiles of the flooring, over the white steps and the carpeted hallway beyond. Once he bent quickly and picked up something, then he walked on with his usual quiet manner, out of which every trace of excitement had now vanished.

The dull winter sun seemed only to make the gloom of the dark vestibule more visible. Johann turned up the light, and Horn, who had visited the Professor several times and knew the situation of the rooms, went at once to the heavy, carved and iron-

trimmed door of the study. He attempted to open the door, but it resisted all pressure. The heavy key was in the inner side of the big lock with its medieval iron ornamentation. But the key was turned so that the lower part of the lock was free, a round opening of unusual size. Horn made sure of this by holding a lighted match to the door.

"You are right," he said to the valet, "the door is locked from the inside. We'll have to go through the bedroom. Johann, bring me a chisel or a hatchet. Muller, you stay here and open the door when the doctor comes."

Muller nodded. Johann disappeared, returning in a few moments with a small hatchet, and followed the commissioner through the dining-room. It was an attractive apartment with its high wooden paneling and its dainty breakfast table. But a slight shiver ran through the commissioner's frame as he realised that some misfortune, some crime even, might be waiting for them on the other side of the closed door. The bedroom door also was locked on the inside, and after some moments of knocking and calling, Horn set the hatchet to the framework just as the bell of the house-door pealed out.

With a cracking and tearing of wood the bedroom door fell open, and in the same moment Muller and the physician passed through the dining-room. Johann hurried into the bedroom to open the window-shutters, and the others gathered in the doorway. A single look showed each of the men that the bed was untouched, and they passed on through the room. The door from the bedroom to the study stood open. In the latter room the shutters were tightly closed, and the lamp had long since gone out. But sufficient light fell through the open bedroom door for the men to see the figure of the Professor seated at his desk,

and when Johann had opened the shutters, it was plain to all that the silent figure before them was that of a corpse.

"Heart disease, probably," murmured the physician, as he touched the icy forehead. Then he felt the pulse of the stiffened hand from which the pen had fallen in the moment of death, raised the drooping head and lifted up the half-closed eyelids. The eyes were glazed.

The others looked on in silence. Horn was very pale, and his usually calm face showed great emotion. Johann seemed quite beside himself, the tears rolled down his cheeks unhindered. Muller stood without a sign of life, his sallow face seemed made of bronze; he was watching and listening. He seemed to hear and see what no one else could see or hear. He smiled slightly when the doctor spoke of "heart disease," and his eyes fell on the revolver that lay near the dead man's hand on the desk. Then he shook his head, and then he started suddenly. Horn noticed the movement; it was in the moment when the physician raised up the sunken figure that had fallen half over the desk.

"He was killed by a bullet," said Muller.

"Yes, that was it," replied the doctor. With the raising of the body the dead man's waistcoat fell back into its usual position, and they could see a little round hole in his shirt. The doctor opened the shirt bosom and pointed to a little wound in the Professor's left breast. There were scarcely three or four drops of blood visible. The hemorrhage had been internal.

"He must have died at once, without suffering," said the physician.

"He killed himself—he killed himself," murmured Johann, as if bewildered.

"It's strange that he should have found time to lay down the revolver before he died," remarked

Horn. Johann put out his hand and raised the weapon before Horn could prevent him. "Leave that pistol where it was," commanded the commissioner. "We have to look into this matter more closely."

The doctor turned quickly. "You think it was a murder?" he exclaimed. "The doors were both locked on the inside—where could the murderer be?"

"I don't pretend to see him myself yet. But our rule is to leave things as they are discovered, until the official examination. Muller, did you shut the outer door?"

"Yes, sir; here is the key."

"Johann, are there any more keys for the outer door?"

"Yes, sir. One more, that is, for the third was lost some months ago. The Professor's own key ought to be in the drawer of the little table beside the bed."

"Will you please look for it, Muller?"

Muller went into the bedroom and soon returned with the key, which he handed to the commissioner. The detective had found something else in the little table drawer—a tortoise-shell hairpin, which he had carefully hidden in his own pocket before rejoining the others.

Horn turned to the servant again. "How many times have you been out of the apartment since last night?"

"Once only, sir, to go to the police station to fetch you."

"And you locked the door behind you?"

"Why, yes, sir. You saw that I had to turn the key twice to let you in."

Horn and Muller both looked the young man over very carefully. He seemed perfectly innocent, and their suspicion that he might have turned the key in pretense only, soon vanished. It would have been a



foolish suspicion anyway. If he were in league with the murderer, he could have let the latter escape with much more safety during the night. Horn let his eyes wander about the rooms again, and said slowly: "Then the murderer is still here—or else——"

"Or else?" asked the doctor.

"Or else we have a strange riddle to solve."

Johann had laid the pistol down again. Muller stretched forth his hand and took it up. He looked at it a moment, then handed it to the commissioner. "We have to do with a *murder* here. There was not a shot fired from this revolver, for every chamber is still loaded. And there is no other weapon in sight," said the detective quietly.

"Yes, he was murdered. This revolver is fully loaded. Let us begin the search at once." Horn was more excited than he cared to show.

Johann looked about in alarm, but when he saw the others beginning to peer into every corner and every cupboard, he himself joined in the man-hunt. A quarter of an hour later, the four men relinquished their fruitless efforts and gathered beside the corpse again.

"Doctor, will you have the kindness to report to the head Commissioner of Police, and to order the taking away of the body? We will look about for some motive for this murder in the meantime," said Horn, as he held out his hand to the physician.

Muller walked out to the door of the house with the doctor.

"Do you think this valet did it?" asked the physician softly.

"He? Oh, dear, no," replied the detective scornfully.

"You think he's too stupid? But this stupidity might be feigned."

"It's real enough, doctor."

"But what do *you* think about it—you, who have the gift of seeing more than other people see, even if it does bring you into disfavour with the Powers that Be?"

"Then you don't believe me yet?"

"You mean about the beautiful Mrs. Kniepp? No."

"And yet I tell you I am right. It was an intentional suicide."

"Muller, Muller, you must keep better watch over your imagination and your tongue! It is a dangerous thing to spread rumours about persons high in favor with the Arch-duke. But you had better tell me what you think about *this* affair," continued the doctor, pointing back towards the room they had just left.

"There's a woman in the case."

"Aha! you are romancing again. Well, they won't be so sensitive about this matter, but take care that you don't make a mistake again, my dear Muller. It would be likely to cost you your position, don't forget that."

The doctor left the house. Muller smiled bitterly as he closed the door behind him, and murmured to himself: "Indeed, I do *not* forget it, and that is why I shall take this matter into my own hands. But the Kniepp case is not closed yet, by any means."

When he returned to the study he saw Johann sitting quietly in a corner, shaking his head, as if trying to understand it all. Horn was bending over a sheet of writing paper which lay before the dead man. Fellner must have been busy at his desk when the bullet penetrated his heart. His hand in dying had let fall the pen, which had drawn a long black mark across the bottom of the sheet. One page of the paper was covered with a small, delicate handwriting.

Horn called up the detective, and together they read the following words:

"Dear Friend:—

"He challenged me—pistols—it means life or death. My enemy is very bitter. But I am not ready to die yet. And as I know that I would be the one to fall, I have refused the duel. That will help me little, for his revenge will know how to find me. I dare not be a moment without a weapon now—his threats on my refusal let me fear the worst. I have an uncanny presentiment of evil. I shall leave here to-morrow. With the excuse of having some pressing family affair to attend to, I have secured several days' leave. Of course I do not intend to return. I am hoping that you will come here and break up my establishment in my stead. I will tell you everything else when I see you. I am in a hurry now, for there is a good deal of packing to do. If anything should happen to me, you will know who it is who is responsible for my death. His name is——"

Here the letter came to an abrupt close.

Muller and Horn looked at each other in silence, then they turned their eyes again toward the dead man.

"He was a coward," said the detective coldly, and turned away. Horn repeated mechanically, "A coward!" and his eyes also looked down with a changed expression upon the handsome, soft-featured face, framed in curly blond hair, that lay so silent against the chair-back. Many women had loved this dead man, and many men had been fond of him, for they had believed him capable and manly.

The commissioner and Muller continued their researches in silence and with less interest than before. They found a heap of loose ashes in the bed-

room stove. Letters and other trifles had been burned there. Muller raked out the heap very carefully, but the writing on the few pieces of paper still left whole was quite illegible. There were several envelopes in the waste-basket, but all of them were dated several months back. There was nothing that could give the slightest clue.

The letter written by the murdered man was sufficient proof that his death had been an act of vengeance. But who was it who had carried out this secret, terrible deed? The victim had not been allowed the time to write down the name of his murderer.

Horn took the letter into his keeping. Then he left the room, followed by Muller and the valet, to look about the rest of the house as far as possible. This was not very far, for the second story was closed off by a tall iron grating.

"Is the house door locked during the daytime?" asked Horn of the servant.

"The front door is, but the side door into the garden is usually open."

"Has it ever happened that any one got into the house from this side door without your knowing it?"

"No, sir. The garden has a high wall around it. And there is extra protection on the side toward the Promenade."

"But there's a little gate there?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is that usually closed?"

"We never use the key for that, sir. It has a trick lock that you can't open unless you know how."

"You said you went to the theatre yesterday evening. Did your master give you permission to go?"

"Yes, sir. It's about a year now that he gave me money for a theatre ticket every Saturday evening. He was very kind."

"Did you come into the house last night by the front door, or through the garden?"

"Through the garden, sir. I walked down the Promenade from the theatre."

"And you didn't notice anything—you saw no traces of footsteps?"

"No, sir. I didn't notice anything unusual. We shut the side door, the garden door, every evening, also. It was closed yesterday and I found the key—we've only got one key to the garden door—in the same place where I was told to hide it when I went out in the evening."

"What place was that?"

"In one of the pails by the well."

"You say you were told to hide it there?"

"Yes, sir; the Professor told me. He'd go out in the evening sometimes, too, I suppose, and he wanted to be able to come in that way if necessary."

"And no one else knew where the key was hidden?"

"No one else, sir. It's nearly a year now that we've been alone in the house. Who else should know of it?"

"When you looked through the keyhole last night, are you sure that the Professor was still alive?"

"Why, yes, sir; of course I couldn't say so surely. I thought he was reading or writing, but oh, dear Lord! there he was this morning, nearly twelve hours later, in just the same position." Johann shivered at the thought that he might have seen his master sitting at his desk, already a corpse.

"He must have been dead when you came home. Don't you think the sound of that shot would have wakened you?"

"Yes, sir, I think likely, sir," murmured Johann. "But if the murderer could get into the house, how could he get into the apartment?"

"There must have been a third key of which you knew nothing," answered Horn, turning to Muller again. "It's stranger still how Fellner could have been shot, for the window-shutters were fastened and quite uninjured, and both doors were locked on the inside."

As he said these words, Horn looked sharply at his subordinate; but Muller's calm face did not give the slightest clue to his thoughts. The experienced police commissioner was pleased and yet slightly angered at this behaviour on the part of the detective. He knew that it was quite possible that Muller had already formed a clear opinion about the case, and that he was merely keeping it to himself. And yet he was glad to see that the little detective had apparently learned a lesson from his recent mistake concerning the death of Mrs. Kniepp—that he had somewhat lost confidence in his hitherto unerring instinct, and did not care to express any opinion until he had studied the matter a little closer. The commissioner was just a little bit vain, and just a little bit jealous of this humble detective's fame.

Muller shrugged his shoulders at the remark of his superior, and the two men stood silent, thinking over the case, as the Chief of Police appeared, accompanied by the doctor, a clerk, and two hospital attendants. The chief commissioner received the report of what had been discovered, while the corpse was laid on a bier to be taken to the hospital.

Muller handed the commissioner his hat and cane and helped him into his overcoat. Horn noticed that the detective himself was making no preparations to go out. "Aren't you coming with us?" he asked, astonished.

"I hope the gentlemen will allow me to remain here for a little while," answered Muller modestly.

"But you know that we will have to close the

apartment officially," said Horn, his voice sharpening in his surprise and displeasure.

"I do not need to be in these rooms any longer."

"Don't let them disturb you, my dear Muller; we will allow your keenness all possible leeway *here*." The Head of Police spoke with calm politeness, but Muller started and shivered. The emphasis on the "here" showed him that even the head of the department had been incensed at his suggestion that the beautiful Mrs. Kniepp had died of her own free will. It had been his assertion of this which, coming to the ears of the bereaved husband, had enraged and embittered him, and had turned the power of his influence with the high authorities against the detective. Muller knew how greatly he had fallen from favour in the Police Department, and the words of his respected superior showed him that he was still in disgrace.

But the strange, quiet smile was still on his lips as, with his usual humble deference, he accompanied the others to the sidewalk. Before the commissioners left the house, the Chief commanded Johann to answer carefully any questions Muller might put to him.

"He'll find something, you may be sure," said Horn, as they drove off in the cab.

"Let him; that's his business. He is officially bound to see more than the rest of us," smiled the older official good-naturedly. "But in spite of it, he'll never get any further than the vestibule; he'll be making bows to us to the end of his days."

"You think so? I've wondered at the man. I know his fame in the capital, indeed, in police circles all over Austria and Germany. It seems hard on him to be transferred to this small town, now that he is growing old. I've wondered why he hasn't done more for himself, with *his* gifts."

"He never will," replied the Chief. "He may win more fame—he may still go on winning triumphs, but he will go on in a circle; he'll never forge ahead as his capabilities deserve. Muller's peculiarity is that his genius—for the man has undeniable genius—will always make concessions to his heart just at the moment when he is about to do something great—and his triumph is lost."

Horn looked up at his superior, whom, in spite of his good nature, he knew to be a sharp, keen, capable police official. "I forgot you have known Muller longer than the rest of us," he said. "What was that you said about his heart?"

"I said that it is one of those inconvenient hearts that will always make itself noticeable at the wrong time. Muller's heart has played several tricks on the police department, which has, at other times, profited so well by his genius. He is a strange mixture. While he is on the trail of the criminal he is like the bloodhound. He does not seem to know fatigue nor hunger; his whole being is absorbed by the excitement of the chase. He has done many a brilliant service to the cause of justice, he has discovered the guilt, or the innocence, of many in cases where the official department was as blind as Justice is proverbially supposed to be. Joseph Muller has become the idol of all who are engaged in this weary business of hunting down wrong and punishing crime. He is without a peer in his profession. But he has also become the idol of some of the criminals. For if he discovers (as sometimes happens) that the criminal is a good sort after all, he is just as likely to warn his prey, once he has all proofs of the guilt and a conviction is certain. Possibly this is his way of taking the sting from his irresistible impulse to ferret out hidden mysteries. But it is rather inconvenient, and he has hurt himself by it—hurt himself badly.



They were tired of his peculiarities at the capital, and wanted to make his years an excuse to discharge him. I happened to get wind of it, and it was my weakness for him that saved him."

"Yes, you brought him here when they transferred you to this town, I remember now."

"I'm afraid it wasn't such a good thing for him, after all. Nothing ever happens here, and a gift like Muller's needs occupation to keep it fresh. I'm afraid his talents will dull and wither here. The man has grown perceptibly older in this inaction. His mind is like a high-bred horse that needs exercise to keep it in good condition."

"He hasn't grown rich at his work, either," said Horn.

"No, there's not much chance for a police detective to get rich. I've often wondered why Muller never had the energy to set up in business for himself. He might have won fame and fortune as a private detective. But he's gone on plodding along as a police subordinate, and letting the department get all the credit for his most brilliant achievements. It's a sort of incorrigible humbleness of nature—and then, you know, he had the misfortune to be unjustly sentenced to a term in prison in his early youth."

"No, I did not know that."

"The stigma stuck to his name, and finally drove him to take up this work. I don't think Muller realised, when he began, just how greatly he is gifted. I don't know that he really knows now. He seems to do it because he likes it—he's a queer sort of man."

While the commissioners drove through the streets to the police station the man of whom they were speaking sat in Johann's little room in close consultation with the valet.

"How long is it since the Professor began to give you money to go to the theatre on Saturday evenings?"

"The first time it happened was on my name day."

"What's the rest of your name? There are so many Johanns on the calendar."

"I am Johann Nepomuk."

Muller took a little calendar from his pocket and turned its pages. "It was May sixteenth," volunteered the valet.

"Quite right. May sixteenth was a Saturday. And since then you have gone to the theatre every Saturday evening?"

"Yes, sir."

"When did the owner of the house go away?"

"Last April. His wife was ill and he had to take her away. They went to Italy."

"And you two have been alone in the house since April?"

"Yes, sir, we two."

"Was there no janitor?"

"No, sir. The garden was taken care of by a man who came in for the day."

"And you had no dog? I haven't seen any around the place."

"No, sir; the Professor did not like animals. But he must have been thinking about buying a dog, because I found a new dog-whip in his room one day."

"Somebody might have left it there. One usually buys the dog first and then the whip."

"Yes, sir. But there wasn't anybody here to forget it. The Professor did not receive any visits at that time."

"Why are you so sure of that?"

"Because it was the middle of summer, and everybody was away."

"Oh, then, we won't bother about the whip. Can you tell me of any ladies with whom the Professor was acquainted?"

"Ladies? I don't know of any. Of course, the Professor was invited out a good deal, and most of

the other gentlemen from the college were married."

"Did he ever receive letters from ladies?" continued Muller.

Johann thought the matter over, then confessed that he knew very little about writing and couldn't read handwriting very well anyway. But he remembered to have seen a letter now and then, a little letter with a fine and delicate handwriting.

"Have you any of these envelopes?" asked Muller. But Johann told him that in spite of his usual carelessness in such matters, Professor Fellner never allowed these letters to lie about his room.

Finally the detective came out with the question to which he had been leading up. "Did your master ever receive visits from ladies?"

Johann looked extremely stupid at this moment. His lack of intelligence and a certain crude sensitiveness in his nature made him take umbrage at what appeared to him a very unnecessary question. He answered it with a shake of the head only. Muller smiled at the young man's ill-concealed indignation and paid no attention to it.

"Your master has been here for about a year. Where was he before that?"

"In the capital."

"You were in his service then?"

"I have been with him for three years."

"Did he know any ladies in his former home?"

"There was one—I think he was engaged to her."

"Why didn't he marry her?"

"I don't know."

"What was her name?"

"Marie. That's all I know about it."

"Was she beautiful?"

"I never saw her. The only way I knew about her was when the Professor's friends spoke of her."

"Did he have many friends?"

"There were ever so many gentlemen whom he called his friends."

"Take me into the garden now."

"Yes, sir." Muller took his hat and coat and followed the valet into the garden. It was of considerable size, carefully and attractively planned, and pleasing even now when the bare twigs bent under their load of snow.

"Now think carefully, Johann. We had a full moon last night. Don't you remember seeing any footsteps in the garden, leading away from the house?" asked Muller, as they stood on the snow-covered paths.

Johann thought it over carefully, then said decidedly, "No. At least I don't remember anything of the kind. There was a strong wind yesterday anyway, and the snow drifts easily out here. No tracks could remain clear for long."

The men walked down the straight path which led to the little gate in the high wall. This gate had a secret lock, which, however, was neither hard to find nor hard to open. Muller managed it with ease, and looked out through the gate on the street beyond. The broad promenade, deserted now in its winter snowiness, led away in one direction to the heart of the city. In the other it ended in the main county high-road. This was a broad, well-made turnpike, with footpath and rows of trees. A half-hour's walk along it would bring one to the little village clustering about the Archduke's favourite hunting castle. There was a little railway station near the castle, but it was used only by suburban trains or for the royal private car.

Muller did not intend to burden his brain with unnecessary facts, so with his usual thoroughness he left the further investigation of what lay beyond the

gate, until he had searched the garden thoroughly. But even for his sharp eyes there was no trace to be found that would tell of the night visit of the murderer.

"In which of the pails did you put the key to the side door?" he asked.

"In the first pail on the right hand side. But be careful, sir; there's a nail sticking out of the post there. The wind tore off a piece of wood yesterday."

The warning came too late. Muller's sleeve tore apart with a sharp sound just as Johann spoke, for the detective had already plunged his hand into the pail. The bottom of the bucket was easy to reach, as this one hung much lower than the others.

Looking regretfully at the rent in his coat, Muller asked for needle and thread that he might repair it sufficiently to get home.

"Oh, don't bother about sewing it; I'll lend you one of mine," exclaimed Johann. "I'll carry this one home for you, for I'm not going to stay here alone—I'd be afraid. I'm going to a friend's house. You can find me there any time you need me. You'd better take the key of the apartment and give it to the police."

The detective had no particular fondness for the task of sewing, and he was glad to accept the valet's friendly offering. He was rather astonished at the evident costliness of the garment the young man handed him, and when he spoke of it, the valet could not say enough in praise of the kindness of his late master. He pulled out several other articles of clothing, which, like the overcoat, had been given to him by Fellner. Then he packed up a few necessities and announced himself as ready to start. He insisted on carrying the torn coat, and Muller permitted it after some protest. They carefully closed the apartment

and the house, and walked toward the centre of the city to the police station, where Muller lived.

As they crossed the square, it suddenly occurred to Johann that he had no tobacco. He was a great smoker, and as he had many days of enforced idleness ahead of him, he ran into a tobacco shop to purchase a sufficiency of this necessity of life.

Muller waited outside, and his attention was attracted by a large grey Ulmer hound which was evidently waiting for some one within the shop. The dog came up to him in a most friendly manner, allowed him to pat its head, rubbed up against him with every sign of pleasure, and would not leave him even when he turned to go after Johann came out of the shop. Still accompanied by the dog, the two men walked on quite a distance, when a sharp whistle was heard behind them, and the dog became uneasy. He would not leave them, however, until a powerful voice called "Tristan!" several times. Muller turned and saw that Tristan's master was a tall, stately man wearing a handsome fur overcoat.

It was impossible to recognise his face at this distance, for the snowflakes were whirling thickly in the air. But Muller was not particularly anxious to recognise the stranger, as he had his head full of more important thoughts.

When Johann had given his new address and remarked that he would call for his coat soon, the men parted, and Muller returned to the police station.

The next day the principal newspaper of the town printed the following notice:

### THE GOLDEN BULLET

It is but a few days since we announced to our readers the sad news of the death of a beautiful woman, whose leap from her window, while suffering from the agonies of fever, destroyed the happiness of an unusually harmonious marriage.

And now we are compelled to print the news of another equally sad as well as mysterious occurrence. This time, Fate has demanded the sacrifice of the life of a capable and promising young man. Professor Paul Fellner, a member of the faculty of our college, was found dead at his desk yesterday morning. It was thought at first that it was a case of suicide, for doors and windows were carefully closed from within and those who discovered the corpse were obliged to break open one of the doors to get to it. And a revolver was found lying close at hand, upon the desk. But this revolver was loaded in every chamber and there was no other weapon to be seen in the room. There was a bullet wound in the left breast of the corpse, and the bullet had penetrated the heart. Death must have been instantaneous.

The most mysterious thing about this strange affair was discovered during the autopsy. It is incredible, but it is absolutely true, as it is vouched for under oath by the authorities who were present, that the bullet which was found in the heart of the dead man was made of solid gold. And yet, strange as is this circumstance, it is still more a riddle how the murderer could have escaped from the room where he had shot down his victim, for the keys in both doors were in the locks from the inside. We have evidently to do here with a criminal of very unusual cleverness and it is therefore not surprising that there has been no clue discovered thus far. The only thing that is known is that this murder was an act of revenge.

The entire city was in excitement over the mystery, even the police station was shaken out of its usual business-like indifference. There was no other topic of conversation in any of the rooms but the mystery of the golden bullet and the doors closed from the inside. The attendants and the policeman gathered whispering in the corners, and strangers who came in on their own business forgot it in their excitement over this new and fascinating mystery.

That afternoon Muller passed through Horn's office with a bundle of papers, on his way to the inner office occupied by his patron, Chief of Police Bauer. Horn, who had avoided Muller since yesterday although he was conscious of a freshened interest in the man, raised his head and watched the little detective as he walked across the room with his usual

quiet tread. The commissioner saw nothing but the usual humble business-like manner to which he was accustomed—then suddenly something happened that came to him like a distinct shock. Muller stopped in his walk so suddenly that one foot was poised in the air. His bowed head was thrown back, his face flushed to his forehead, and the papers trembled in his hands. He ran the fingers of his unoccupied hand through his hair and murmured audibly, "That dog! that dog!" It was evident that some thought had struck him with such insistence as to render him oblivious of his surroundings. Then he finally realised where he was, and walked on quickly to Bauer's room, his face still flushed, his hands trembling. When he came out from the office again, he was his usual quiet, humble self.

But the commissioner, with his now greater knowledge of the little man's gifts and past, could not forget the incident. During the afternoon he found himself repeating mechanically, "That dog—that dog." But the words meant nothing to him, hard as he might try to find the connection.

When the commissioner left for his home late that afternoon, Muller re-entered the office to lay some papers on the desk. His duties over, he was about to turn out the gas, when his eye fell on the blotter on Horn's desk. He looked at it more closely, then burst into a loud laugh. The same two words were scribbled again and again over the white surface, but it was not the name of any fair maiden, or even the title of a love poem; it was only the words, "That dog——"

Several days had passed since the discovery of the murder. Fellner had been buried and his possessions taken into custody by the authorities until his heirs should appear. The dead man's papers and affairs were in excellent condition, and the arranging of the



inheritance had been quickly done. Until the heirs should take possession, the apartment was sealed by the police. There was nothing else to do in the matter, and the commission appointed to make researches had discovered nothing of value. The murderer might easily feel that he was absolutely safe by this time.

The day after the publication of the article we have quoted, Muller appeared in Bauer's office and asked for a few days' leave.

"In the Fellner case?" asked the Chief with his usual calm, and Muller replied in the affirmative.

Two days later he returned, bringing with him nothing but a single little notice.

"Marie Dorn, now Mrs. Kniepp," was one line in his notebook, and beside it some dates. The latter showed that Marie Dorn had for two years past been the wife of the Archducal Forest-Councillor, Leo Kniepp.

And for one year now Professor Paul Fellner had been in the town, after having applied for his transference from the university in the capital to this place, which was scarce half an hour's walk distant from the home of the beautiful young woman who had been the love of his youth.

And Fellner had made his home in the quietest quarter of the city, in that quarter which was nearest the Archducal hunting castle. He had lived very quietly, had not cultivated the acquaintance of the ladies of the town, but was a great walker and bicycle rider; and every Saturday evening since he had been alone in the house, he had sent his servant to the theatre. And it was on Saturday evenings that Forest-Councillor Kniepp went to his Bowling Club at the other end of the city, and did not return until the last train at midnight.

And during these evening hours Fellner's apart-

ment was a convenient place for pleasant meetings; and nothing prevented the Professor from accompanying his beautiful friend home through the quiet Promenade, along the turnpike to the hunting castle. And Johann had once found a dog-whip in his master's room—and Councillor Leo Kniepp, head of the Forestry Department, was the possessor of a beautiful Ulmer hound which took an active interest in people who wore clothes belonging to Feller.

Furthermore, in the little drawer of the bedside table in the murdered man's room, there had been found a tortoise-shell hairpin; and in the corner of the vestibule of his house, a little mother-of-pearl glove button, of the kind much in fashion that winter, because of a desire on the part of the ladies of the town to help the home industry of the neighbourhood. Mrs. Marie Kniepp was one of the fashionable women of the town, and several days before the Professor was murdered, this woman had thrown herself from the second-story window of her home, and her husband, whose passionate eccentric nature was well known, had been a changed man from that hour.

It was his deep grief at the loss of his beloved wife that had turned his hair grey and had drawn lines of terrible sorrow in his face—said gossip. But Muller, who did not know Kniepp personally although he had been taking a great interest in his affairs for the last few days, had his own ideas on the subject, and he decided to make the acquaintance of the Forest Councillor as soon as possible—that is, after he had found out all there was to be found out about his affairs and his habits.

Just a week after the murder, on Saturday evening therefore, the snow was whirling merrily about the gables and cupolas of the Archducal hunting cas-

tle. The weather-vanes groaned and the old trees in the park bent their tall tops under the mad wind which swept across the earth and tore the protecting snow covering from their branches. It was a stormy evening, not one to be out in if a man had a warm corner in which to hide.

An old peddler was trying to find shelter from the rapidly increasing storm under the lee of the castle wall. He crouched so close to the stones that he could scarcely be seen at all, in spite of the light from the snow. Finally he disappeared altogether behind one of the heavy columns which sprang out at intervals from the magnificent wall. Only his head peeped out occasionally as if looking for something. His dark, thoughtful eyes glanced over the little village spread out on one side of the castle, and over the railway station, its most imposing building. Then they would turn back again to the entrance gate in the wall near where he stood. It was a heavy iron-barred gate, its handsome ornamentation outlined in snow, and behind it the body of a large dog could be occasionally seen. This dog was an enormous grey Ulmer hound.

The peddler stood for a long time motionless behind the pillar, then he looked at his watch. "It's nearly time," he murmured, and looked over towards the station again, where lights and figures were gathering.

At the same time the noise of an opening door was heard, and steps creaked over the snow. A man, evidently a servant, opened the little door beside the great gate and held it for another man to pass out. "You'll come back by the night train as usual, sir?" he asked respectfully.

"Yes," replied the other, pushing back the dog, which fawned upon him.

"Come back here, Tristan," called the servant,

pulling the dog in by his collar, as he closed the door and re-entered the house.

The Councillor took the path to the station. He walked slowly, with bowed head and uneven step. He did not look like a man who was in the mood to join a merry crowd, and yet he was evidently going to his Club. "He wants to show himself; he doesn't want to let people think that he has anything to be afraid of," murmured the peddler, looking after him sharply. Then his eyes suddenly dimmed and a light sigh was heard, with another murmur, "Poor man." The Councillor reached the station and disappeared within its door. The train arrived and departed a few moments later. Kniepp must have really gone to the city, for although the man behind the pillar waited for some little time, the Councillor did not return—a contingency that the peddler had not deemed improbable.

About half an hour after the departure of the train the watcher came out of his hiding place and walked noisily past the gate. What he expected, happened. The dog rushed up to the bars, barking loudly, but when the peddler had taken a silk muffler from the pack on his back and held it out to the animal, the noise ceased and the dog's anger turned to friendliness. Tristan was quite gentle, put his huge head up to the bars to let the stranger pat it, and seemed not at all alarmed when the latter rang the bell.

The young man who had opened the door for the Councillor came out from a wing of the castle. The peddler looked so frozen and yet so venerable that the youth had not the heart to turn him away. Possibly he was glad of a little diversion for his own sake.

"Who do you want to see?" he asked.

"I want to speak to the maid, the one who attended your dead mistress."

"Oh, then you know——?"

"I know of the misfortune that has happened here."

"And you think that Nanette might have something to sell to you?"

"Yes, that's it; that's why I came. For I don't suppose there's much chance for any business with my cigar holders and other trifles here so near the city."

"Cigar holders? Why, I don't know; perhaps we can make a trade. Come in with me. Why, just see how gentle the dog is with you!"

"Isn't he that way with everybody? I supposed he was no watchdog."

"Oh, indeed he is. He usually won't allow anybody to touch him, except those whom he knows well. I'm astonished that he lets you come to the house at all."

They had reached the door by this time. The peddler laid his hand on the servant's arm and halted a moment. "Where was it that she threw herself out?"

"From the last window upstairs there."

"And did it kill her at once?"

"Yes. Anyway she was unconscious when we came down."

"Was the master at home?"

"Why, yes, it happened in the middle of the night."

"She had a fever, didn't she? Had she been ill long?"

"No. She was in bed that day, but we thought it was nothing of importance."

"These fevers come on quickly sometimes," remarked the old man wisely, and added: "This case interests the entire neighbourhood and I will show you that I can be grateful for anything you may tell me—"

of course, only what a faithful servant could tell. It will interest my customers very much."

"You know all there is to know," said the valet, evidently disappointed that he had nothing to tell which could win the peddler's gratitude. "There are no secrets about it. Everybody knows that they were a very happy couple, and even if there was a little talk between them on that day, why it was pure accident and had nothing to do with the mistress' excitement."

"Then there was a quarrel between them?"

"Are people talking about it?"

"I've heard some things said. They even say that this quarrel was the reason for her death."

"It's stupid nonsense!" exclaimed the servant. The old peddler seemed to like the young man's honest indignation.

While they were talking, they had passed through a long corridor and the young man laid his hand on one of the doors as the peddler asked, "Can I see Miss Nanette alone?"

"Alone? Oho, she's engaged to me!"

"I know that," said the stranger, who seemed to be initiated into all the doings of this household. "And I am an old man—all I meant was that I would rather not have any of the other servants about."

"I'll keep the cook out of the way if you want me to."

"That would be a good idea. It isn't easy to talk business before others," remarked the old man as they entered the room. It was a comfortably furnished and cozily warm apartment. Only two people were there, an old woman and a pretty young girl, who both looked up in astonishment as the men came in.

"Who's this you're bringing in, George?" asked Nanette.

"He's a peddler and he's got some trifles here you might like to look at."

"Why, yes, you wanted a thimble, didn't you, Lena?" asked Nanette, and the cook beckoned to the peddler. "Let's see what you've got there," she said in a friendly tone. The old man pulled out his wares from his pack; thimbles and scissors, coloured ribbons, silks, brushes and combs, and many other trifles. When the women had made their several selections they noticed that the old man was shivering with the cold, as he leaned against the stove. Their sympathies were aroused in a moment. "Why don't you sit down?" asked Nanette, pushing a chair towards him, and Lena rose to get him something warm from the kitchen.

The peddler threw a look at George, who nodded in answer. "He said he'd like to see the things they gave you after Mrs. Kniepp's death," the young man remarked.

"Do you buy things like that?" Nanette turned to the peddler.

"I'd just like to look at them first, if you'll let me."

"I'd be glad to get rid of them. But I won't go upstairs, I'm afraid there."

"Well, I'll get the things for you if you want me to," offered George and turned to leave the room. The door had scarcely closed behind him when a change came over the peddler. His old head rose from its drooping position, his bowed figure started up with youthful elasticity.

"Are you really fond of him?" he asked of the astonished Nanette, who stepped back a pace, stammering in answer: "Yes. Why do you ask? and who are you?"

"Never mind that, my dear child, but just answer

the questions I have to ask, and answer truthfully, or it might occur to me to let your George know that he is not the first man you have loved."

"What do you know?" she breathed in alarm.

The peddler laughed. "Oho, then he's jealous! All the better for me—the Councillor was jealous too, wasn't he?" Nanette looked at him in horror.

"The truth, therefore, you must tell me the truth, and get the others away, so I can speak to you alone. You *must* do this—or else I'll tell George about the handsome carpenter in Church street, or about Franz Schmid, or——"

"For God's sake, stop—stop—I'll do anything you say."

The girl sank back on her chair pale and trembling, while the peddler resumed his pose of a tired old man leaning against the stove. When George returned with a large basket, Nanette had calmed herself sufficiently to go about the unpacking of the articles in the hamper.

"George, won't you please keep Lena out in the kitchen. Ask her to make some tea for us," asked Nanette with well feigned assurance. George smiled a meaning smile and disappeared.

"I am particularly interested in the dead lady's gloves," said the peddler when they were alone again.

Nanette looked at him in surprise but was still too frightened to offer any remarks. She opened several boxes and packages and laid a number of pairs of gloves on the table. The old man looked through them, turning them over carefully. Then he shook his head: "There must be some more somewhere," he said. Nanette was no longer astonished at anything he might say or do, so she obediently went through the basket again and found a little box in which were several pair of grey suede gloves, fastened



by bluish mother-of-pearl buttons. One of the pairs had been worn, and a button was missing.

"These are the ones I was looking for," said the peddler, putting the gloves in his pocket. Then he continued: "Your mistress was rather fond of taking long walks by herself, wasn't she?"

The girl's pale face flushed hotly and she stammered: "You know—about it?"

"You know about it also, I see. And did you know everything?"

"Yes, everything," murmured Nanette.

"Then it was you and Tristan who accompanied the lady on her walks?"

"Yes."

"I supposed she must have taken some one into her confidence. Well, and what do you think about the murder?"

"The Professor?" replied Nanette hastily. "Why, what should I know about it?"

"The Councillor was greatly excited and very unhappy when he discovered this affair, I suppose?"

"He is still."

"And how did he act after the—let us call it the accident?"

"He was like a crazy man."

"They tell me that he went about his duties just the same—that he went away on business."

"It wasn't business this time, at least not professional business. But before that he did have to go away frequently for weeks at a time."

"And it was then that your mistress was most interested in her lonely walks, eh?"

"Yes." Nanette's voice was so low as to be scarcely heard.

"Well, and this time?" continued the peddler. "Why did he go away this time?"

"He went to the capital on private business of his own."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Quite sure. He went two different times. I thought it was because he couldn't stand it here and wanted to see something different. He went to his club this evening, too."

"And when did he go away?"

"The first time was the day after his wife was buried."

"And the second time?"

"Two or three days after his return."

"How long did he stay away the first time?"

"Only one day."

"Good! Pull yourself together now. I'll send your George in to you and tell him you haven't been feeling well. Don't tell any one about our conversation. Where is the kitchen?"

"The last door to the right down the hall."

The peddler left the room and Nanette sank down dazed and trembling on the nearest chair. George found her still pale, but he seemed to think it quite natural that she should have been overcome by the recollection of the terrible death of her mistress. He gave the old man a most cordial invitation to return during the next few days. The cook brought the peddler a cup of steaming tea, and purchased several trifles from him, before he left the house.

When the old man had reached a lonely spot on the road, about half way between the hunting castle and the city, he halted, set down his pack, divested himself of his beard and his wig and washed the wrinkles from his face with a handful of snow from the wayside. A quarter of an hour later, Detective Muller entered the railway station of the city, burdened with a large grip. He took a seat in the night express which rolled out from the station a few moments later.

As he was alone in his compartment, Muller gave way to his excitement, sometimes even murmuring

half-awake the thoughts that rushed through his brain. "Yes, I am convinced of it, but can I find the proofs?" the words came again and again, and in spite of the comfortable warmth in the compartment, in spite of his tired and half-frozen condition, he could not sleep.

He reached the capital at midnight and took a room in a small hotel in a quiet street. When he went out next morning, the servants looked after him with suspicion, as in their opinion a man who spent most of the night pacing up and down his room must surely have a guilty conscience.

Muller went to police headquarters and looked through the arrivals at the hotels on the 21st of November. The burial of Mrs. Kniepp had taken place on the 20th. Muller soon found the name he was looking for, "Forest Councillor Leo Kniepp," in the list of guests at the Hotel Imperial. The detective went at once to the Hotel Imperial, where he was already well known. It cost him little time and trouble to discover what he wished to know, the reason for the Councillor's visit to the capital.

Kniepp had asked for the address of a goldsmith, and had been directed to one of the shops which had the best reputation in the city. He had been in the capital altogether for about twenty-four hours. He had the manner and appearance of a man suffering under some terrible blow.

Muller himself was deep in thought as he entered the train to return to his home, after a visit to the goldsmith in question. He had a short interview with Chief of Police Bauer, who finally gave him the golden bullet and the keys to the apartment of the murdered man. Then the two went out together.

An hour later, the chief of police and Muller stood in the garden of the house in which the murder had occurred. Bauer had entered from the Promenade

after Muller had shown him how to work the lock of the little gate. Together they went up into the apartment, which was icy cold and uncanny in its loneliness. But the two men did not appear to notice this, so greatly were they interested in the task that had brought them there. First of all, they made a most minute examination of the two doors which had been locked. The keys were still in both locks on the inside. They were big heavy keys, suitable for the tall massive heavily-panelled and iron-ornamented doors. The entire villa was built in this heavy old German style, the favourite fashion of the last few years.

When they had looked the locks over carefully, Muller lit the lamp that hung over the desk in the study and closed the window shutters tight. Bauer had smiled at first as he watched his protégé's actions, but his smile changed to a look of keen interest as he suddenly understood. Muller took his place in the chair before the desk and looked over at the door of the vestibule, which was directly opposite him. "Yes, that's all right," he said with a deep breath.

Bauer had sat down on the sofa to watch the proceedings, now he sprang up with an exclamation: "Through the keyhole?"

"Through the keyhole," answered Muller.

"It is scarcely possible."

"Shall we try it?"

"Yes, yes, you do it." Even the usually indifferent old chief of police was breathing more hastily now. Muller took a roll of paper and a small pistol out of his pocket. He unrolled the paper, which represented the figure of a French soldier with a marked target on the breast. The detective pinned the paper on the back of the chair in which Professor Fellner had been seated when he met his death.

"But the key was in the hole," objected Bauer suddenly.

"Yes, but it was turned so that the lower part of the hole was free. Johann saw the light streaming through and could look into the room. If the murderer put the barrel of his pistol to this open part of the keyhole, the bullet would have to strike exactly where the dead man sat. There would be no need to take any particular aim." Muller gazed into space like a seer before whose mental eye a vision has arisen, and continued in level tones: "Fellner had refused the duel and the murderer was crazed by his desire for revenge. He came here to the house, he must have known just how to enter the place, how to reach the rooms, and he must have known also, that the Professor, coward as he was——"

"Coward? Is a man a coward when he refuses to stand up to a maniac?" interrupted Bauer.

Muller came back to the present with a start and said calmly, "Fellner was a coward."

"Then you know more than you are telling me now?"

Muller nodded. "Yes, I do," he answered with a smile. "But I will tell you more only when I have all the proofs in my own hand."

"And the criminal will escape us in the meantime."

"He has no idea that he is suspected."

"But—you'll promise to be sensible this time, Muller?"

"Yes. But you will pardon me my present reticence, even towards you? I—I don't want to be thought a dreamer again."

"As in the Kniepp case?"

"As in the Kniepp case," repeated the little man with a strange smile. "So please allow me to go about it in my own way. I will tell you all you want to know to-morrow."

"To-morrow, then."

"May I now continue to unfold my theories?"

Bauer nodded and Muller continued: "The criminal wanted Fellner's blood, no matter how."

"Even if it meant murder," said Bauer.

Muller nodded calmly. "It would have been nobler, perhaps, to have warned his victim of his approach, but it might have all come to nothing then. The other could have called for help, could have barricaded himself in his room, *one* crime might have been prevented, and another, more shameful one, would have gone unavenged."

"Another crime? Fellner a criminal?"

"To-morrow you shall know everything, my kind friend. And now, let us make the trial. Please lock the door behind me as it was locked then."

Muller left the room, taking the pistol with him. Bauer locked the door. "Is this right?" he asked.

"Yes, I can see a wide curve of the room, taking in the entire desk. Please stand to one side now."

There was deep silence for a moment, then a slight sound as of metal on metal, then a report, and Muller re-entered the study through the bedroom. He found Bauer stooping over the picture of the French soldier. There was a hole in the left breast, where the bullet, passing through, had buried itself in the back of the chair.

"Yes, it was all just as you said," began the chief of police, holding out his hand to Muller. "But—why the golden bullet?"

"To-morrow, to-morrow," replied the detective, looking up at his superior with a glance of pleading.

They left the house together and in less than an hour's time Muller was again in the train rolling towards the capital.

He went to the goldsmith's shop as soon as he arrived. The proprietor received him with eager in-

terest and Muller handed him the golden bullet. "Here is the golden object of which I spoke," said the detective, paying no heed to the other's astonishment. The goldsmith opened a small locked drawer, took a ring from it and set about an examination of the two little objects. When he turned to his visitor again, he was evidently satisfied with what he had discovered. "These two objects are made of exactly the same sort of gold, of a peculiar old French composition, which can no longer be produced in the same richness. The weight of the gold in the bullet is exactly the same as in the ring."

"Would you be willing to take an oath on that if you were called in as an expert?"

"I am willing to stand up for my judgment."

"Good. And now will you read this over please, it contains the substance of what you told me yesterday. Should I have made any mistakes, please correct them, for I will ask you to set your signature to it."

Muller handed several sheets of close writing to the goldsmith and the latter read aloud as follows: "On the 22nd of November, a gentleman came into my shop and handed me a wedding ring with the request that I should make another one exactly like it. He was particularly anxious that the work should be done in two days at the very latest, and also that the new ring, in form, colour, and in the engraving on the inside, should be a perfect counterpart of the first. He explained his order by saying that his wife was ill, and that she was grieving over the loss of her wedding ring which had somehow disappeared. The new ring could be found somewhere as if by chance and the sick woman's anxiety would be over. Two days later, as arranged, the same gentleman appeared again and I handed him the two rings.

"He left the shop, greatly satisfied with my work

and apparently much relieved in his mind. But he left me uneasy in spirit because I had deceived him. It had not been possible for me to reproduce exactly the composition of the original ring, and as I believed that the work was to be done in order to comfort an invalid, and I was getting no profit, but on the contrary a little extra work out of it, I made *two* new rings, lettered them according to the original and gave them to my customer. The original ring I am now, on this seventh day of December, giving to Mr. Joseph Muller, who has shown me his legitimation as a member of the Secret Police. I am willing to put myself at the service of the authorities if I am called for."

"You are willing to do this, aren't you?" asked Muller when the goldsmith had arrived at the end of the notice.

"Of course."

"Have you anything to add to this?"

"No, it is quite complete. I will sign it at once."

Several hours later, Muller re-entered the police station in his home town and saw the windows of the chief's apartment brilliantly lighted. "What's going on," he asked of Bauer's servant who was just hurrying up the stairs.

"The mistress' birthday, we've got company."

Muller grumbled something and went on up to his own room. He knew it would not be pleasant for his patron to be disturbed in the midst of entertaining his guests, but the matter was important and could not wait.

The detective laid off his outer garments, made a few changes in his toilet and putting the goldsmith's declaration, with the ring and the bullet in his pocket-book, he went down to the first floor of the building, in one wing of which was the apartment occupied by



the Chief. He sent in his name and was told to wait in the little study. He sat down quietly in a corner of the comfortable little room beyond which, in a handsomely furnished smoking room, a number of guests sat playing cards. From the drawing rooms beyond, there was the sound of music and many voices.

It was all very attractive and comfortable, and the solitary man sat there enjoying once more the pleasant sensation of triumph, of joy at the victory that was his alone and that would win him back all his old friends and prestige. He was looking forward in agreeable anticipation to the explanations he had to give, when he suddenly started and grew pale. His eyes dimmed a moment, then he pulled himself together and murmured: "No, no, not this time. I will not be weak this time."

Just then the Chief entered the room, accompanied by Councillor Kniepp.

"Won't you sit down here a little?" asked the friendly host. "You will find it much quieter in this room." He pulled up a little table laden with cigars and wine, close to a comfortable armchair. Then, noticing Muller, he continued with a friendly nod: "I'm glad they told you to wait in here. You must be frozen after your long ride. If you will wait just a moment more, I will return at once and we can go into my office. And if you will make yourself comfortable here, my dear Kniepp, I will send our friend Horn in to talk with you. He is bright and jovial and will keep you amused."

The chief chattered on, making a strenuous endeavour to appear quite harmless. But Kniepp, more apt than ever just now to notice the actions of others, saw plainly that his genial host was concealing some excitement. When the latter had gone out the Councillor looked after him, shaking his head. Then his

glance fell by chance on the quiet-looking man who had risen at his entrance and had not sat down again.

"Please sit down," he said in a friendly tone, but the other did not move. His grey eyes gazed intently at the man whose fate he was to change so horribly.

Kniepp grew uneasy under the stare. "What is there that interests you so about me?" he asked in a tone that was an attempt at a joke.

"The ring, the ring on your watch chain," murmured Muller.

"It belonged to my dead wife. I have worn it since she left me," answered the unhappy man with the same iron calm with which he had, all these past days, been emphasizing his love for the woman he had lost. Yet the question touched him unpleasantly and he looked more sharply at the strange man over in the corner. He saw the latter's face turn pale and a shiver run through his form. A feeling of sympathy came over Kniepp and he asked warmly: "Won't you take a glass of this wine? If you have been out in the cold it will be good for you." His tone was gentle, almost cordial, but the man to whom he offered the refreshment turned from him with a gesture that was almost one of terror.

The Councillor rose suddenly from his chair. "Who are you? What news is it you bring?" he asked with a voice that began to tremble.

Muller raised his head sharply as if his decision had been made, and his kind intelligent eyes grew soft as they rested on the pale face of the stately man before him. "I belong to the Secret Police and I am compelled to find out the secrets of others—not because of my profession—no, because my own nature compels me—I *must* do it. I have just come from Vienna and I bring the last of the proofs necessary to turn you over to the courts. And yet you are a thousand

times better than the coward who stole the honour of your wife and who hid behind the shelter of the law—and therefore, therefore, therefore——” Muller’s voice grew hoarse, then died away altogether.

Kniepp listened with pallid cheeks but without a quiver. Now he spoke, completing the other’s words: “And therefore you wish to save me from the prison or from the gallows? I thank you. What is your name?” The unhappy man spoke as calmly as if the matter scarcely concerned him at all.

The detective told him his name.

“Muller, Muller,” repeated the Councillor, as if he were particularly anxious to remember the name. He held out his hand to the detective. “I thank you, ah, indeed, I thank you,” he said with the first sign of emotion he had shown, and then added low: “Do not fear that you will have trouble on my account. They can find me in my home.” With these words he turned away and sat down in his chair again. When Bauer entered the room a few moments later, Kniepp was smoking calmly.

“Now, Muller, I’m ready. Horn will be in in a moment, friend Kniepp; I know you will enjoy his chatter.” The chief led the way out of the room through another door. He could not see the ghastly pale face of the guest he left behind him, for it was almost hidden in a cloud of thick smoke, but Muller turned back once more at the threshold and caught a last grateful glance from eyes shadowed by deep sadness, as the Councillor raised his hand in a friendly gesture.

“Dear Muller, you take so long to get at the point of the story! Don’t you see you are torturing me?” This outburst came from the Chief about an hour later. But the detective would not permit himself to be interrupted in spinning out his story in his own

way, and it was nearly another hour before Bauer knew that the man for whose name he had been waiting so long was Leo Kniepp.

The knowledge came as a terrible surprise to him. He was dazed almost. "And I,—I've got to arrest him in my own house?" he exclaimed as if horrified.

And Muller answered calmly: "I doubt if you will have the opportunity, sir."

"Muller! Did you, again——"

"Yes, I did! I have again warned an unfortunate. It's my nature, I can't seem to help it. But you will find the Councillor in his house. He promised me that."

"And you believe it?"

"That man will keep his promise," said Muller quietly.

Councillor Kniepp did keep his promise. When the police arrived at the hunting castle shortly after midnight, they found the terrified servants standing by the body of their master.

"Well, Muller, you had better luck than you deserved this time," Bauer said a few days later. "This last trick has made you quite impossible for the service. But you needn't worry about that, because the legacy Kniepp left you will put you out of reach of want."

The detective was as much surprised as anybody. He was as if dazed by his unexpected good fortune. The day before he was a poor man bowed under the weight of sordid cares, and now he was the possessor of twenty thousand gulden. And it was not his clever brain but his warm heart that had won this fortune for him. His breast swelled with gratitude as he thought of the unhappy man whose life had been ruined by the careless cruelty of others and his own passions. Again and again he read the letter which had been found on Kniepp's desk, addressed to him

and which had been handed out to him after the inquest.

*My friend:—*

You have saved me from the shame of an open trial. I thank you for this from the very depth of my heart. I have left you a part of my own private fortune, that you may be a free man, free as a poor man never can be. You can accept this present for it comes from the hand of an *honest* man in spite of all. Yes, I compelled my wife to go to her death after I had compelled her to confess her shame to me, and I entered her lover's house with the knowledge I had forced from her. When I looked through the keyhole and saw his false face before me, I murdered him in cold blood. Then, that the truth might not be suspected, I continued to play the sorrowing husband. I wore on my watch chain the ring I had had made in imitation of the one my wife had worn. This original ring of hers, her wedding ring which she had defiled, I sent in the form of a bullet straight to her lover's heart. Yes, I have committed a crime, but I feel that I am less criminal than those two whom I judged and condemned, and whose sentence I carried out as I now shall carry out my own sentence with a hand which will not tremble. That I can do this myself, I have you to thank for, you who can look into the souls of men and recognise the most hidden motives, you who have not only a wonderful brain but a heart that can feel. You, I hope, will sometimes think kindly of your grateful

LEO KNIOPP.

Muller kept this letter as one of his most sacred treasures.

The "Kniepp Case" was really, as Bauer had predicted, the last in Muller's public career. Even the friendliness of the kind old chief could not keep him in his position after this new display of the unreliability of his heart. But his quiet tastes allowed him to live in humble comfort from the income of his little fortune.

Every now and then letters or telegrams will come for him and he will disappear for several days. His few friends believe that the police authorities, who refused to employ him publicly owing to his strange weakness, cannot resist a private appeal to his talent whenever a particularly difficult case arises.





CANCELLED  
JUL 28 1954



